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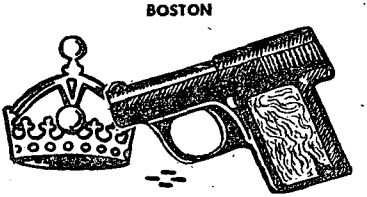

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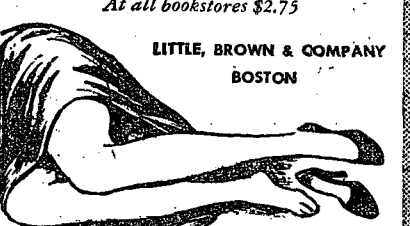

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Remember the Kefauver crime investigation on television? Who could ever forget it! Well, like all the others who watched it in a kind of rapt horror, Veronica Parker Johns found that she could not tear her eyes and ears away from the visual and oral revelations. Up to that time, Miss Johns confesses, she had always looked upon gangsters as sort of movie characters, comic or sinister, often with hearts of gold; but when some bigtime and littletime hoods sat down, to all intents and purposes, in Miss Johns's own living-room, and let their hair down, the veneer of glamor cracked wide open.

Out of her loathing for racketeers and crooks came the realization that there is a sort of homogeneity of evil: a bad guy is a bad guy no matter how many layers of glamor he wears, and Veronica Parker Johns came to hate that innate, inveterate badness. This hate is directed, of course, against professional criminals — not against those who get into the act by mistake, but against the men and women of obvious ability who deliberately, callously, ruthlessly choose Wrong instead of Right.

So Miss Johns sat down and wrote a story which represents her protest against these particular powers of darkness. The story has some characters you won't forget easily — Maxie and Bat and especially Bebe (née Amantha) — and a mood that will linger in your memory a long time. You will understand all too clearly why the judges awarded a Second Prize to Veronica Parker Johns's "Homecoming."

HOMECOMING

by VERONICA PARKER JOHNS

BEBE WATCHED THE DRAKE BREAST its way through the browning grass. He was white with shocking-pink trimmings; a Muscovy, she remembered, one of those her father had most treasured, not the mongrel breed which had taken over since his death. It wore the bracelet of yellow plastic with which Pop had banded his flock. I, too, have a bracelet, she thought, glancing down at the circlet of emeralds and diamonds for which half the police in the Middle West were searching; I have a bracelet, and I have Max, and all the police in the world must be looking for *him*.

The drake paused in his foraging to stare over his shoulder at the girl, his beady eye unblinking.

"What's that you say, duck?" she asked huskily. "You don't want I should mention Max, not while

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you're eating? You got a point there. I'm sort of beginning to feel that way about him myself."

The drake turned and edged nearer, curiosity obviously overcoming its natural wariness. How long had it been, until this week, since a human voice had sounded on the farm? Pop died more than three years ago, and Granny hadn't talked to herself more than three or four months after that before the lawyer mailed the deed to Bebe, telling her she was now the only one left to pay the taxes.

Mom — if you could call anyone you knew so slightly by such a chummy name — had hightailed it out of there with a horn-player when Bebe was six years old and known as little Amantha Evans. Amantha! That would sure have looked silly on the marquee of a movie theater, providing she'd ever been able to get it that far off the ground. It had even looked foolish in the fine print used for chorines at the Dipsydoodle Club, where Max had found her, had taken her away from all that, and had taken all that away from her.

Or was it she who had found him? During the sixth and final routine that Saturday night, with the cold, gray Chicago dawn waiting for her outside the alley door, had she found the hot, dark eyes, the strong arms (growing flabby now) which fradulently promised warmth? It didn't matter any more who had done the finding. It had all happened so long ago — eight years by the calendar, at least forty times that by any accurate form of reckoning.

Quit beefing, she scolded herself. There's a certain amount of prestige in being Maxie Swanson's girl. Better than dying in a four-bit rooming house with some hophead horn-player, as your mother did, and as Granny had kept promising you would too. A helluva promise to make, day in and day out, to a little kid, and Granny made it with such straight-from-the-feedbag certainty that Amantha had rushed away at fourteen to become Bebe.

Now she was back, in residence. Should she run up the flag as they do for home games? Hardly. Maxie wouldn't like that. Maxie would like it if you didn't have to breathe so often, so you wouldn't stir up so much air and people would be less likely to notice. Since that last job, the one that had included the diamond and emerald bracelet, he was a mighty shy guy. He just wanted to rusticate — okay, hide out, to use the vulgar expression — on Bebe's farm, the rest of his life if need be, although it probably wouldn't amount to that.

Well, she could stand it, better than he could maybe. But only if she was able to make the place look more presentable, more like it had been when her father was alive. It was so ratty now, so needy that it made her want to cry — the rose bed choked by weeds, the shrubs strangled by honeysuckle, and the stinking posion ivy pulling its tricks all over the joint.

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She'd need tools to work with; the ones her father had used were little more than rust. Maybe Maxie would let her make a trip into the neighboring town to get some. There was little chance that she would be recognized. Not much of a fourteen-year-old face is left when you reach twenty-two, not when the meantime has been so real lowdown mean.

Even before she got the tools she could tackle the eight-foot ragweed, which hedged the house, with her bare hands — bare, that was, but for a three-and-a-half-carat diamond and a horse-choking star sapphire. She tugged at the first stalk fiercely, hating it, crowding in all the hate she felt for other things, other persons, for Maxie, for, dear God, herself most of all.

At her fury the drake took flight, down toward the pond, which was probably still there although you could not see it through the overgrowth. Near the pond, she remembered, was her father's pride and joy, inherited from his father before him, the dewberry patch. Not just an ordinary dewberry, which isn't exactly ordinary to begin with, but a dewberry cross that Grandfather Evans had bred, with which he used to win a medal every year at the county fair.

People always asked for cuttings and Grampa wasn't stingy with it, but "Funny thing, Amantha" (she could hear his cracked old voice and the high-pitched laughter that set the dewberry jelly glasses to quivering), "it won't thrive no place except on our own land. Puny little pea-size berries is all the other get, without a fairy's thimbleful of juice in a dozen of them."

There probably wasn't a berry bush left to keep his memory green. Poor Grampa. Poor Pop. Poor Amantha, dead Lord knows how many years; buried, calendarwise, eight.

Maxie Swanson lay sprawled on the horsehair sofa in a crumpled white linen suit, like a stain in the Evans's parlor, like spilled milk worth the crying over. His shoes, size thirteen, were neatly set upon the floor beside him. That's one thing to my credit, Bebe thought as she paused in the doorway: Granny wouldn't let Pop and Grampa put their feet up on that sofa, and I raised enough of a hassle so that Maxie don't dare do it with his shoes on.

"The bugs in this house is terrible," he complained querulously, as if he'd been lying there thinking about them a long time, and blaming Bebe.

"They're clean, country bugs," she came to their defense. "Not like the bedbugs and worse you grew up with."

Maxie was always quick with his hands. He drew a bead on a horsefly, scooped it out of the air and into a peachblow rose bowl, held his palm flat against the top. The fly buzzed frenziedly, batting against the opaque glass.

"You fixing to pick off its wings, Maxie?" she asked caustically.

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"No. Just thought if you were so fond of country bugs I'd catch you one for a pet. Better than you feeding that blasted cat that keeps mooching around."

"That cat's starved," she protested. "His people don't take care of him properly. You can't expect me not to —"

"Can't I?" he asked, half-kiddingly, swinging his feet to the floor, using the hand pressed against the rose bowl for leverage.

"Watch out!" she shouted. "You want to break that vase? It's an antique, you clumsy ape!"

He held it inverted in his hand for a moment, then pitched it through the open window. She heard it smash against a stone, and ran to look out at the blue and blue-green fragments. She whimpered, in impotent rage.

"Don't cry, little girl," Max purred. "I'll buy you another fly. I'll buy you anything in the lousy world you want. You know that, don't you, baby?"

He could reach her now without getting off the sofa, and he put out an arm and drew her to him.

"You know that, don't you, baby?" he repeated, rubbing his forehead against her bare shoulder. "All you gotta do is ask Maxie pretty. Only I want you should stop feeding that cat. You wouldn't want him to put the finger on me, would you?"

"That's kind of farfetched, Max," she said, not weakening yet, not allowing herself to feel the way he had always been able to make her feel.

"No, it ain't," he contradicted in the little voice, the kid voice, the one that got her. "The people he belongs to would be sure to notice him putting on weight, and they might see him heading for this place day after day. It would seem kind of funny that a cat could get a handout in a house that's been empty three years. You wouldn't want them to check up and find me, would you, honey?"

He stroked her ribs gently. "What's more," he said, "maybe the cat's folks like him skinny, like I like you. Don't you never let me catch you with your face in some other guy's saucer of cream. You're my girl, Bebe. Ain't you glad?"

He held her closer, his head an inch or two below her chin. After a while she lifted a hand and thrust it into his dark, thick, tantalizing hair.

"Sure, Maxie," she whispered. "I'm glad, I guess."

She had dropped off into a shallow slumber from which the car awakened her. Max had not been asleep and, as she opened her eyes, had rushed across the room to get the Luger. He cocked it toward the door, crouching, nostrils taut with his drawn-in breath. Fool! she thought. How scary can you be? Couldn't he recognize the motor of his own bodyguard's car?

Bat — Jean Baptiste Larue — never even glanced at the gun when he walked in and dropped the first load of packages; Max put it back on the curly-maple table, beside the basket of wax fruit under a dome of glass.

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"What in hell took you so long, Bat?" he asked suspiciously. "You been shooting the breeze with the local yokels again?"

For a muscle man, for just about the hardest hood on two feet, Bat had a surprisingly soft voice, "Sure, Boss," he said. "It's like I told you, I've got to do it. It's the custom around here to pass the time of day. Was I to buy my stuff and get the hell out, people would get nosey."

"But what do you find to yak about?" Max asked with the bewilderment of a man who had never needed small talk.

Bat laughed. "About myself. Not Bat Larue, if you follow me, but the fellow I want them to think I am."

He perched on the arm of the Boston rocker, continuing, "That's one sweet guy, that one. Always buying stuff for the other people in the camp." Bat lived in a trailer parked at the Maple Rest, a couple of miles down the road. "Like more food than a lone bachelor could possibly eat. Like that oven for the oil stove Bebe wanted. I said it was for a dear old lady who's shoving off for California tomorrow."

"Did you get it, Bat?" Bebe broke in. "Honest?"

"I sure did."

"Gee," she breathed. "And the ham, a big one?"

He nodded.

"Which one's the ham?" she asked. "Boy, is it going to taste good! It'd be better, of course, if I could use the big old coal stove —"

Max spoke harshly, "Will you for the love of Pete quit harping on the coal stove? I told you you couldn't light it, and that's that. Do you want to send up smoke signals to the neighborhood like some silly Indian?"

"Awright, already," she snapped. "We use the oil stove. I guess it'll do, since it has to. How big's the oven, Bat? I wonder if I could squeeze in some popovers in Granny's iron pan."

"Popovers!" Max snorted. "You think you're a baker or something?"

"I'm a very good baker," she informed him. "Granny taught me how. I can bake a pie any day as good as hers, and she was top prize-winner at the fair."

"Cripes, what hick stuff," Max said contemptuously. Bat looked at her as though he had flipped her wig, and no wonder. Back in Chicago she'd never set foot inside the kitchen, and here she was getting all excited about an oven.

"I'll get you your toy, Bebe," Bat said, and went back to the car.

It was a good dinner. It was the best meal any one of them had had since Max, with Bat's assistance, stuck up the jewelry store on Michigan Avenue last week. That job was the biggest they'd ever pulled and the loot should net them enough to live high on the hog the rest of their lives; but until now the pickings had been poor.

Maxie's plans always worked smoothly because he kept them simple and figured out all the angles in ad-

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vance. He would have been a success even in a legitimate business if his fancy had happened to turn in that direction.

He never did the obvious. No getaway car for him, in which to be trapped in city traffic. He scheduled the Marlowe job for a quarter-hour before closing time, herded the clerks into the vault, having to shoot only one of them to prove his point. The other three who died weren't on Max's conscience because they wouldn't have suffocated if help had been a little quicker in reaching them. Nevertheless, he acted as if he felt real sorry when he read of their deaths in the next afternoon's newspaper.

One of them had been married less than a month to a girl who must have been quite a looker, if you allowed for the fact that her eyes were pretty puffy from crying and newspaper pictures aren't exactly flattering. It was she who had phoned the police around four-thirty in the morning to say her husband had not come home. It hadn't seemed odd, even to a bride, before then. You had to hand it to Maxie. He'd picked a night when there was a jewelers' convention in town, when visiting firemen would be blamed for keeping papa out late. What with Bat's having disconnected the alarm system and the telephone, the three guys in the vault didn't have much of a prayer.

After Max had made a smart selection from the cases, he and Bat went out onto the Avenue, at the moment when thousands of others were doing that very thing. They'd taken the shuttle bus to the parking lot out by Soldier's Field, where a car had waited since morning. Then, like hundreds of commuters, they'd headed south, across the line into Indiana, then east to the meeting with Bebe.

She had been waiting, in Bat's car to which was attached the shabby old trailer, at the spot marked X on her map, the side road through the dunes leading to a lake in which the other car could be submerged. Max stepped into the trailer with better than a half-million worth of glitter and ate the bowl of soup she had heated over a can of Sterno.

That's the way it had been ever since — soup until it came out of your ears, and delicatessen stuff. Then, after Bat bought the oil stove yesterday, chops, pan fried. But now that she had the oven there were no limits.

She poured the coffee, set the pot upon the table, and put on a kettle of water for dishes. It was good, clear spring water, and thank the Lord that Pop had at least run pipes into the kitchen, even if that was as much plumbing as the house had to offer. It was funny how finicky you could get about a bowl, a pitcher, and a privy in eight years. Maybe, if she handled him right, Max would blow the house to a bathroom or two after the heat was off him.

She splashed some cream into her coffee, disgustedly watched it curdle and rise to the surface.

"Sour," she said. "Cream's sour.

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Bat, do you think you could buy that old bag who's going to California some type icebox? I'm tired of stuff spoiling, and warm beer. And when I want a bourbon on the rocks I don't mean diamonds."

"Always griping," Max grumbled. "Quit it, willya?" But he patted her cheek, admitted that she could really cook, and belched to show his happy surfeit.

He was in a good mood, and she took advantage of it. "Another thing," she said, "I want a flock of garden tools. A spade. A pitchfork."

"Have a heart, Bebe," Bat flagged her down. "What would a guy living in a trailer want with them things? You want them to think I'm a grave robber?"

"Pruning shears," she ignored him. "Lawn mower. Handsaw. I don't know, lots of things. Maybe I ought to drive in with you and pick them out myself."

Max choked on his coffee and spilled some of it on his white jacket before he could get the cup back to its saucer. His good mood had been completely rubbed out.

"Are you crazy or something?" he growled. "Somebody'd recognize that kisser of yours. You're not going nowhere, Bebe, not for one hell of a long time." He got up and went over to the sink, dabbed at the coffee stains with a damp towel.

He was a neat dresser, Maxie was, a mirror of fashion, and a joy to behold. At least he used to be when his tailor, his barber, and his haberdasher were striving to please. As he stood near the sink, in the full glare of the oil lamp with the reflector, she observed that he had gone downhill fast. He was frowsy, mussed, not even particularly clean. He didn't look good, and she was going to see an awful lot of him, cooped up here, not even able to go to a movie once in a while to escape his unmanicured hands.

He was breathing heavily, looking at her with what was almost hatred. In back of him his shadow on the wall heaved its shoulders. The shadow was huge, towering, as though all the evil in him had burst its bounds and become visible, and for the first time since they had met she was afraid of him.

"Okay, Maxie," she said tensely. "We won't discuss the matter any further just now."

"We ain't never going to discuss it," he stated, and threw the wet towel in her face.

The half-grown cat lay curled on a pile of weeds Bebe had pulled out of the berry patch. Finished, resting, Bebe stroked the soft gray fur above its belly.

"Where did those ribs go, hey?" she whispered. "I can't call you Mr. Bones any more like I did a couple of months ago. You're more like Mr. Butterball."

She yawned, rolled up the jersey sleeves to catch the August sun, and stretched out an arm to pluck a jewel-red berry from one of Grampa's bushes. The dewberry cross miracu-

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lously continued to bear like rabbits in the nest of weeds it had taken her eight days to remove. The red juice stained her fingernails which had not been so colored in weeks, not since the nail polish ran out and Bat had refused to buy her any lest his cronies at the store kid the pants off him.

Bat was all right, though. He'd sneaked a trowel to her, a little five-fingered cultivator, small stuff he'd said he was buying for the trailer's window-box. Max didn't know about that, of course. If he found out there wasn't any doubt in her mind that he would beat the tar out of Bat, dependent though he was upon him, lost as he would be without him.

Max, for something that he would have called a reason, had made a big deal out of Bebe's not getting the garden tools she wanted. Maybe it was because of that first night she mentioned them, when he threw the towel at her. He hadn't been satisfied with just throwing it. He'd gone over and picked it off her lap, slapped her cheeks with it until she screamed and Bat had got up enough nerve to take it from the boss's hand. After that Bebe hadn't spoken to Max for a whole week, and things had never really been the same between them again. Max, in his twisted-up head, must blame everything on the garden tools, and was damned if he would let her have them.

She'd managed pretty well without them. The grass was hayfield deep, but the rose bed was clear and pretty as it used to be, and now the berry patch. She'd ruined every dress she owned in the doing, and was reduced to wearing the cutoff tops of them with boy's jeans, because Bat couldn't buy girl's clothes without getting the horse laugh. It was a good thing that all the mirrors in the house were old, except the dime-store one above the sink in which you could see only your face. Bebe knew she must look a sight, but she didn't care. She'd never in her life felt better, getting tired from things instead of of them, seeing the farm perk up under her fussing fingers.

She had a relapse, naturally, every time she looked at Max, but she was doing that less and less. He never came outdoors if he could help it, just stayed in the parlor, snoozing, reading the newspapers, or playing solitaire, looking like one of the slugs she found when she turned over rocks.

It wasn't good news he found in the papers. Two people had seen him leave the jewelry store and identified his photographs in the police files. The drowned car had been found near the dunes, and its license plates traced to him. Every fence he had ever used was under surveillance, and the country had been flooded with sketches and descriptions of the stolen articles. Max Swanson was wanted and how, and it was no wonder that he had grown so mean.

She popped another berry into her mouth and ruffled the kitten's fur. "Mr. Butterball," she murmured. "That's who you are."

The emerald and diamond bracelet

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glinted in the sunlight as she took it off. "Would you like a fine collar for your christening, Mr. B.?" she offered. "Let's see how it looks. It's only a loan, you understand."

The bracelet fitted the cat's neck loosely and she snapped the catch, hearing what might have been an echo behind her, or the crack of a twig. Without turning she knew what it was. The cat, in a way, knew too, tensing its body, smelling danger. Yet she turned, to see Max half-hidden behind a maple tree, glaring at her like a man outraged.

"You crazy?" he muttered, stunned. "You crazy, Bebe? Take that thing off its neck before it runs home and gives me away."

The cat had already begun to scamper off, but it did not get far; the Luger, which Max had held concealed behind the maple, took care of that.

It was a big gun for such a small target, and the range was deplorably close. Bebe screamed, and screamed, and screamed again until Max's hand against her mouth silenced her. Then she bit the free flesh between his thumb and palm and tasted blood. He jerked his hand away hastily, but she didn't yell any more. She just said,

"You crumb. You rotten crumb."

She walked toward the house the long way, so she would not have to pass Mr. Butterball.

Bat was standing on the doorstep, peering down at the pond. Because she had not taken the direct route he did not see her at first, instead saw Max swaggering up the hill toward him.

"Where's Bebe?" Bat called through his cupped hands. "What the hell happened to her? I heard —"

"Here I am," she said. "In back of you."

He turned, with a touching expression of relief.

"Are you all right?" he asked. "Did he — I heard a shot, then you screaming."

"I'm all right," she assured him, surprised that it seemed so important to him.

Max rounded the corner of the broken-down porch, puffing a little, the gun still in his hand.

"Got a job for you, Bat," he remarked banteringly. "Little matter of a funeral. Bebe's the chief mourner. She'll make the arrangements."

He put the gun into its holster and grasped her wrist with the hand that was too holy to touch dead cats.

"Poor Bebe lost her bracelet," he taunted. "She's a pretty careless girl. Get it for her quick, Bat," His tone became serious. "She might catch cold without it."

He cast her arm away roughly, and yawned in her face. "Think I'll get some shut-eye before dinner," he said. "What's to eat, Bebe?"

She turned from him sullenly, folding her arms and jutting out her chin. Max went into the house without waiting for an answer.

"What's the rhubarb?" Bat asked.

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"He killed the lousy cat," she said dully.

"No kidding?" He seemed dismayed. "I'm sorry, kid, honest I am."

"Sure." Her lip curled. "A fat lot of good that does the cat."

"Well, *I* didn't do it. You needn't get sore at me."

"I'm not sore at you, Bat. As a matter of fact, I'm grateful to you for worrying about me. It was sort of friendly, and the Lord knows I need a friend."

"Well, you got one, pal. Me." He paused. "You want I should bury the cat real nice, put some rocks around the grave or something?"

"Please," she said. "Thanks. He's a little that side of the maple tree." She pointed. "The trowel's in the berry patch."

"Can do." He touched her shoulder lightly, said, "Take care of yourself," and walked away.

It was advice that almost made her laugh as she entered the house and turned left into the kitchen, away from the living-room where Max had already begun to snore. Little good taking care of herself would do with a killer like Max around. The only way she'd been able to live with him was by playing a game of shut-eye of her own, by pretending that he found the taking of life distressing and was a tender guy at heart. People who got in his way when he was pulling a job, according to one of the rules of her game, plainly got what they asked for, and kind of offended Max by obliging him to do away with them.

Now that she had seen him kill she could no longer kid herself. He hadn't flinched, had not looked sorry afterward. The cat represented a menace which he had averted as calmly and instinctively as a skilled driver turns a steering wheel to avoid a bump in the road. Reflex action. Something threatens you, you kill it.

It could be me, she thought. I could very well be next. I can't run as fast as a cat. Besides, I have no place to run to.

She went to the cabinet to get a few things she needed for supper. Her hand brushed the flour cannister and she remembered the last time she had used it. She'd spilled some flour on the floor and Mr. Butterball, who had been visiting, sat down in it, leaving the impression of his little round bottom and tail as clear as a footprint. She wished she hadn't remembered that just now, because it made her cry.

She was still crying when Bat came in. He patted her, clumsily, then walked to the sink and turned on the water.

"I gotta wash up your bracelet before you put it on," he said soberly. "It's —"

"Don't bother," she sobbed. "You could have buried it on the cat for all I care. I'll never wear that rotten thing again."

"Max won't like that," Bat warned. "It's a mighty valuable hunk of junk and he wanted you should have it. He'd think you didn't have no respect

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for him if you don't wear presents he gives you."

"Respect!" She laughed hysterically. "I *hate* Max, and every filthy thing he ever gave me. I wish to God I could kick him off my farm."

Her sobs grew louder, drowning out Max's snoring, possibly covering the sound of his footsteps if he should wake and mosey out to the kitchen. Without audible assurance that his boss remained in the parlor, Bat got panicky.

"Shut up, Bebe," he said, but not crossly. "I get fed up with Max myself, sometimes, but you've got to admit he's a good provider. It'll just mean a row if he hears you talking like this. You don't mean it. It's just that you're kind of stir-crazy, like the rest of us."

He patted her forearm awkwardly as her choking subsided and he could again hear the buzz-saw in the other room. "You know what I wish I could do?" he asked cajolingly. "There's some sort of fair going on in town. They've got a merry-go-round and a Ferris wheel, and dolls you throw baseballs at. I wish I could take you. That would cheer —"

"Oh, Bat!" She brightened. "It must be Ellsworth County Fair Week. Honest, would you take me?"

He looked solemn. "You know I can't, Bebe," he reminded her. "I just meant I wished I could. It'd be fun."

"Fun?" she echoed. "It was the most fun I ever had when I was a little girl. I used to go every day and hang around the vegetables my Pop had entered, and Grampa's dewberries, and Granny's baked goods. I was so proud of them things I could have died. They were the best, Bat, in every class, the biggest, the juiciest, the tastiest. They took every blue ribbon in sight." She sighed. "I guess that's why I never wanted to sell the farm. Max thought I should when the lawyer wrote me, but I guess I was still a little proud of the things that had been grown here." Her mouth twisted. "And now, of course, he's glad I held on. Only the farm don't seem the same to me, with him on it. I can't feel proud like I used to."

Her forehead puckered, but her eyes were dry and dancing.

"Bat," she implored, "you've just got to take me! You could go shopping in the morning and I'd sneak down to the road to meet you. Through the woods. Max would just think I was off weeding or sulking somewheres."

"It's too big a risk, kid. Max would kill me if he found out."

"No, he wouldn't," she insisted. "He needs you."

"Or I'd kill him." His mouth was grim. "I'm not sure which. I don't really know what I'd do if Max got tough with me. He never has."

"He *needs* you, Bat. And I need to get back to the way I felt when I was a little girl, before Maxie came into my life. Will you help me try?"

She took his chin in her hands and forced his head around so that he must see the pleading in her eyes.

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"Well," he said slowly, and she knew she had won.

It was a bright, spanking day, the kind especially manufactured for Ellsworth County Fair Week. From the top of the Ferris wheel you could see for miles, past the hills, and the world seemed very large indeed. Then the cage descended and the world became small, gay, and full of friends who jostled you, and you jostled back, laughing as they laughed. It was simply terrific not to be afraid, here where there were no Lugers, no hair-triggered tempers, no Maxies.

Sleeping so much during the day, Max was an early riser and she had given him his breakfast before she left. She'd been so disagreeable to him since he shot the cat that he didn't seem to mind when she wandered off afterward with a book. She was reading *Little Women*. Most of the stuff around the farm was pretty longhair, but she sure got a kick out of that Jo. She had parked the book on a birch stump near the road, where she planned to leave Bat's car when they returned.

That would have to be pretty soon, she regretted; the two hours Bat had allotted her were nearly up. He was to look for her near the judges' table in the main tent.

She hoped he would be late. Judging was just about to begin, and that was what she most wished to see. It was Cakes, Cookies, and Doughnuts today; Pies tomorrow. In the old days Granny would have swept the field.

She hurried toward the raised platform in the center of the tent to get a ringside seat, and with a twinge of disappointment saw that Bat was already there. For an instant she considered trying to hide from him, but he saw her, too, out of the corner of his eye, as men in his trade learn to do.

"You had to be ahead of time, didn't you?" she grumbled. "You gonna drag me right away?"

He smiled at her. "Relax, Baby," he drawled. "We can give it a whirl for a while."

He was holding two sticks of cotton candy. He presented one to her, saying, "Here. Live a little. You been having fun?"

"The best," she said wistfully. She buried her nose in the pink foam, came up for air, laughing. The band at the end of the tent blared a merry dance tune.

"I thought you could hide your face in the candy if you see anybody you know," Bat explained.

"Oh? So that's it." Her eyebrows rose sharply, and the band obliged by shifting to a sour waltz. "You mean you didn't buy it because I might get a bang out of it, but because you thought I needed false whiskers."

Her voice was flat, and so was the cotton candy when she took another bite of it. She tossed it away, half-eaten. "The heck with it," she said. "The stuff depresses me. You keep diving in for a bit of sweetness and it moves away from you. Just like my life, Bat."

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The joy had gone out of her, but she felt a little stir of interest as the judges clustered around and plunged a knife into the first chocolate layer cake. A fat lady judge tasted first, chewing like a poker-faced cow. She seemed vaguely familiar in a reminiscent sort of way — not like someone Bebe actually had seen before, was perhaps the daughter of an old acquaintance. That was possible. Those judgeships were generally hereditary, and the generation in office eight years ago had been pretty much on its last legs. Old man Judson, for instance, must have been older than Methuselah.

Mr. Judson had been the head judge throughout her childhood — a dear, twinkly little man who made the same joke every year and laughed as hard at it. He would say, delighting Bebe — or, rather, Amantha — that he really should disqualify himself in any class in which Granny Evans was entered, because entries were supposed to be judged on an anonymous basis and he always knew which were hers. He boasted that he could spot Granny's pie crust in the dark, and there was no chance at all of fooling him if the pie happened to be filled with grampa's dewberries. He'd recognize those big, juicy beauties if he lived to be a hundred and ten —

It appeared that he had a fair chance of reaching that age. For Bebe saw him climb onto the platform, spry as ever, late, but in time to pass final and inexorable judgement upon the chocolate layer. Fragile as a cobweb, he still had commanding presence and a sizeable streak of the actor in him. He twinkled and bowed to the crowd, tasted the cake, smacked his thin, withered lips and waved at a friend with a bony but sunbrowned hand. Then he sat and waited for the lesser judges to eliminate the entries unworthy of his tastebuds.

He still continued to dominate the scene, however, his bright blue eyes casing the audience and finding many friends there. Once his gaze lingered a moment on Bebe and her heart thumped in sudden fear; these old eyes, still keen, might be just the pair to pierce through to some memory of Amantha. She sighed in relief as they moved on to another face.

That would be all she'd need, she reflected, to fix things up good with Maxie. Old man Judson was on speaking terms with just about everybody in town. If he so much as *thought* he had seen Amantha Evans he would mention it, and the curious would be coming out to the farm in droves. For she was in no doubt as to the kind of reputation she must enjoy in the neighborhood. Granny would have taken care of that, gloating — "like mother, like daughter" — clearing her own blood line of any taint, shooting off her big mouth about Amantha's being the girl friend of some big crook in Chicago, maybe even mentioning Max's name.

She clutched Bat's arm. "Let's get out of here," she urged. "This memory-lane stuff is giving me the creeps."

They were about to announce the winning chocolate layer, and she was

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surprised to see Bat react, as though she had asked him to leave the ball park when the bases were loaded in the bottom of the ninth. But he didn't put up a fight. He knew they had already stayed overtime and Max might be getting anxious.

Max was anxious, all right. He had hauled that great flabby body of his off the parlor sofa and down to the road. Keeping just within the roadside woods he'd walked to a point beyond *Little Women* on the birch stump.

Bebe was watching for the stump when she saw Max. At her gasp Bat turned and saw him too, stopping the car with a screech of brakes.

There wasn't anyone else in sight, but she instinctively knew that Max wouldn't pull anything here, where it might at any moment become public. She opened the door. "Going our way?" she asked quaveringly, and moved over to give him room.

He sat there muttering all the way back to the house, all the foul words she had ever heard, meaninglessly strung together. Even when the car stopped he didn't move.

Nor did the other two, for several minutes. Bat was the first to recover and get out of the car. When Bebe started to follow him Max grabbed her thigh, pressing hard with his wide fingertips.

"Max!" she cried involuntarily. "You're hurting me!"

"I'm going to kill you," he announced, quite steadily. "You and your gentleman friend. I'm just making up my mind which gets it first."

She whacked at his fingers, but they only gripped harder.

"Let go of me," she panted. "And shut up with that killing stuff. You got no cause to be sore at Bat. I was just taking a little walk for myself down the road, and he found me and brought me home. That's what you'd want him to do, isn't it?"

"You've been gone a pretty long time."

"It was a pretty long walk."

"Yeah?" he derided. "Tell me another."

Bat was methodically taking the packages out of the car, stacking them beside it. His face was flushed, his lips stiff.

"How about carrying some of this stuff in, Maxie?" he asked in what did not seem at all to be his voice. "You can use the practice. If you kill me you're going to have to run your own errands from now on. And don't forget to drop in at the post office when you're in town. There's a swell picture of you hanging on the wall."

Max's eyes went shrewd. Bebe could almost see the wheels turning as he weighed his need of Bat. But I, she thought, like those poor punks in that war movie, I'm expendable.

"Yes sirree," Bat used the country expression he had picked up, "you've sure been lucky to have me to do your chores, me who always had enough sense not to get his picture taken, whose mother didn't give him a puss that's easy to remember. But if you

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kill me, pal, your luck's going to run out — fast."

The hand on Bebe's thigh clenched into a fist which Max pounded in emphasis as he asked, "You think I need you? Why, there's twenty guys who'd like to take your place —"

"Yeah?" Bat cut in coolly. "How're you gonna pass the word to them that the job is open? You gonna walk into the railroad station and send a wire? They got a picture of you there, too."

Max spluttered, glowering at his fist as if it symbolized the power which had suddenly deserted him. Then he was like an animal in a trap, flailing out at whatever was nearest to him. What was nearest to him was Bebe. He drove the fist into her ribs like a piston, over and over, while she caught at the steering wheel and tried to pull herself away from him toward the side of the car on which Bat stood.

"No, you don't, sister," Bat said abruptly, and slammed the door. "I ain't mixing in any family quarrels." With the back of his hand he smacked her smartly across the mouth. "You caused enough trouble already, wandering down the road."

He picked up a few of the bundles and started for the house, pausing to say to Max, "We ain't gonna let a dame come between us, are we, Boss, after all we've been to each other?"

"No," Max answered deliberately. "I guess you're right." He took the Luger from its holster and twirled it around a finger.

Bebe's mouth felt bee-stung. Her eyes weren't working too well, and she was sort of groggy. Once more she tried to scramble out of the car, but Bat had locked the door from the outside. As she fumbled with the catch Max reached over to help her, his arm gliding across her shoulder like a snake.

"Had you scared, baby, didn't I?" he purred. "Well, you had me scared, too, for a minute. If I thought that you and Bat were up to any funny business I'd have to kill the both of you. But if you're still my girl everything's okay. You are my girl, ain't you, Bebe?"

She crouched, not answering him.

"But don't take no more long walks down the road," he advised. "I need you around to cook and take care of a few other little things, see? From now on you don't get out of my sight, except when you're in the kitchen. So behave yourself real good, because Junior and me," he patted the gun, "will be watching you night and day."

"Better I should be dead," she cracked tartly, meaning it as sarcasm, yet well aware that she might have spoken the truth.

She sat stiff as a corpse in the parlor which had been the setting of all the Evans's funerals for the last ninety years. Even Mom's. Even that miserable sinner had been brought back for a few grudging words of farewell. And who will say them over me? Bebe wondered.

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Not Bat, she reminded herself once again, definitely not Bat. Lately she had begun to think she could count on him, that he was really her friend; but there weren't any real friends in the dog-eat-dog world in which Bat and Maxie lived, into which she had migrated. There was only betrayal, the right hand of friendship swapped for the stab in the back.

The worst of it was she had grown so used to their way of thinking that she couldn't feel angry at Bat. To satisfy a whim of hers he had flirted with death. He'd talked his way out of it this time, but the threat would return if he so much as smiled at her. Considering the dim future that sticking by her presented, she couldn't blame him for sitting firmly in Maxie's corner.

But did he have to seem to enjoy it so much? Playing gin all afternoon with the boss, the Luger on the table between them, for which he reached as readily as Max if she so much as stirred in her chair. Laughing at every nasty crack Max threw her way, trying to reinstate himself solidly, succeeding so well that when she said she would like to pick some dewberries to make a pie for supper Max told him to go along and keep an eye on her.

She got a pail from the kitchen and led the way through the hip-high lawn, past the maple tree where Max had stood when he shot Mr. Butterball. Bat followed so closely she could hear his breathing. When she increased her pace he quickened his, and when she knelt by the first berry bush his shadow fell upon her like a hawk's on baby chickens.

The berries were always at their peak during Fair Week. There was a bushel of them at least, and she had a swift remembrance of the bustle of jelly-making, the blessed exhaustion that followed it. It would be something for her to do tomorrow, would help get her through the day.

She moved to another bush, Bat's shadow following her. "You could help me pick," she complained, "instead of just standing there."

"Haven't you got enough?" He eyed the basket.

"For the pie, yes, but I've got a notion to put up some jelly tomorrow. There's a flock of old jars in the barn. I —"

"Listen to me, Bebe," he silenced her. "Keep your head down and keep picking. He may be watching from the house. Maybe he don't trust me so good as he makes out."

Her hands shook so violently she dropped four out of five berries.

"I've been doing some thinking," Bat went on. "When I talked Max out of killing me this morning I talked myself into something else. I seen that he needs me bad, but that I don't need him at all. I'm gonna blow, Bebe. When I go to the trailer camp tonight, I just ain't coming back."

That will make things real cosy, she thought crazily. Just Maxie and me. And the Luger makes three. "Send me a postcard sometime," she said dryly.

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"No. You don't understand. You needn't be here tomorrow to put up no jelly if you come with me. What do you say, kid?"

What *do* you say when a fellow opens the door of the fiery furnace and asks you to please step out? While waiting for the words she moved to another bush. Again he followed her, his shadow not seeming oppressive now, but welcome as tree shade.

"How could we do it?" she whispered. "Would it work?"

"Like a charm," he assured her. "You just give him a good dinner and leave the rest to me. When he falls asleep afterward, on the sofa, I'll shoot him."

She rocked back on her heels as though he had hit her again. "Oh, no!" she heard herself saying indignantly. "That wouldn't do at all."

A cheap gangster murder in the Evans's parlor? It was unthinkable. It was bad enough to have Maxie there alive, but to leave him dead on the bloodied horsehair sofa would be the worst insult that could happen to the farm.

"We'd make out fine," Bat promoted. "We'd go to New York. I got connections there, bookies, pushers. In a little while I'll be getting you things as good as Maxie ever got you."

She looked up at him, then at the house, seeing the one clearly for the weak guy he was, the other for what it could be if she worked over it, if she swept out the human filthiness that had corrupted it.

She drove her fingers into the earth, scooped up a handful of it, held it out to Bat. "Could you get me anything as good as this?" she asked quietly.

He looked puzzled, and she felt that she owed him at least an explanation.

"I mean," she groped, "I've got something pretty wonderful right here, if I stick with it and find a way to unload our friend Maxie without him shooting me first. There's nice things about you, Bat. There used to be nice things about him. It's just that neither of you would dream of doing an honest day's work in your lives. When I think of how my father worked over this place and what I've let happen to it —"

"It killed him, didn't it?" he challenged. "Your Pop died young."

"Not as a young as some of your friends, and a whole lot tidier. Besides, you wouldn't want me with you, Bat. I'm not the girl I was, since I came back here. The farm's done something to me."

He seemed stunned. "I'm going anyhow, Bebe," he said stubbornly. "You'll just have to manage somehow with Max, though it don't sound like no clambake." Then he asked the big question: "Or can you think of a better way to get rid of him?"

"It'll come to me," she tried to sound confident. "The farm won't let nothing terrible happen to me, now that I've come home. I've got faith in it. This is where I've got to stay. And it's good earth," she

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streaked a toe through it. "Stuff will grow here that won't take hold nowhere else. These berries, for instance. Nobody else could get them to —"

She stopped, running smack into a glimmer of hope. It was an outside chance and the odds were long, but it was worth a try.

"Bat, honey," she cooed, "would you do me a favor before you go?"

"Maybe," he hedged warily. "I won't rat on Max, if that's what you got in mind. I won't tip the cops off where he is. I'd kill him, but I wouldn't doublecross him."

"It's nothing like that. You'll think I'm nuts, but I'd love to have something from the farm in the Fair this year. If I bake an extra dewberry pie, will you slip it onto the judge's table? You may have to swipe an entry card from another pie, so things will look legit, but I think you're the boy who can handle it."

He threw back his head and laughed. "This chick is coocoorooney," he told the air. "If that's all you want, and it means so much to you, sure I'll do it."

She smiled her thanks and hurried toward the house.

It was expecting an awful lot of an aged palate and old memory, but she had to believe in someone, and her money was on old Mr. Judson. She could imagine his thin lips smacking as he recalled Granny's pastry, Grampa's dewberry cross, and the sad thing that happened to the little girl, Amantha, who went to Chicago and fell in with a bad lot.

As she blended the shortening into the flour she vowed that this would be the most magnificent pie ever turned out of this kitchen. After all, Granny in her maddest moment of creation had never thought of adding an emerald and diamond bracelet.

"O"

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Here is a warm, human, pathetic little story by Arthur Miller whose play, "Death of a Salesman," won all the major dramatic awards of 1949, including the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and the Antoinette Perry Award. "Death of a Salesman" is now considered one of the finest modern tragedies — indeed, some critics have called it the finest American drama ever written, and many have compared the author with Shakespeare. The very qualities which made "Death of a Salesman" so magnificent — its compassionate insight, the universality of its characters, its almost overwhelming sense of tragedy — are present, although on a smaller canvas, in "Death of an Old Man."

DEATH OF AN OLD MAN

by ARTHUR MILLER

THE COUNTERMAN WAS NOT A CONversationalist. Nor was the policeman. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning and the only sound was an occasional push of wind outside. The counterman leaned against the coffee urn which he had just drained and absorbed its faint warmth through his shirt. The policeman ate daintily. The counterman, his arms crossed, stared through the window at the street. He liked one thing about the policeman; the man ate like a man. Some people disgusted him, the way they ate. In general, he liked this policeman, although he had little knowledge of him. He was about thirty-three or thereabouts and his skin was very fair, and now the wind had brought a fresh redness to it that set off his fine black hair. The policeman's name was Herbert and he had been to college. That was all the counterman knew. But the counterman was not a conversationalist. He just stared out the window.

"Mr. Abrams," the policeman said.

The counterman turned to him. "Something else?"

"Just had a funny experience."

"That so?" said the counterman.

"Yeah, it was very funny."

The wind pushed the sign outside. Mr. Abrams worried about it for a moment. He noticed now that the policeman had stopped eating with a sizeable piece of chop untouched. And there was something excited in his black eyes, in the constant wetting of his lips with his tongue. The policeman finally put his fork down and leaned his head on his hand, his elbow on the edge of the counter. "A man just died," he said.

"That so?"

There was a mystery in the police-

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man's gaze, as though something had come out of the darkness during the evening's tour and had given him a glimpse of itself, only to rush away. He seemed still to be staring after it — not frightened, but no longer his calm self.

"I found out I knew him," he said after a while.

"Don't say?"

"Yeah. Came as a complete surprise. I was with Dowling in the car, see? And this call came over. Just a regular death call. But it was a rooming house, so we had to go over and investigate."

"Murdered?"

"Lemme tell you what happened. Most peculiar experience. We got the call, and I thought nothing of it, just drove over. It was near the steel mills, on Baxter Street."

"That's a rotten neighborhood."

"Yeah. But I thought nothing of it, see? So we ride, and just as we turn the corner into Baxter I see the ambulance parked in front of this house. And suddenly the whole thing came back to me."

"Don't say?"

"It's so peculiar, because I'd completely forgotten about this little guy. See, about ten years ago — remember when I first started coming in here?"

"It's close to eleven years."

"Anyway, I was still in training, see?"

"Yeah, you were a lot thinner then."

"I was driving that time, and I had the lieutenant in the car, grading me. And suddenly this call came over and we went to this rooming house. Lot of people in the hall, excitement, people running up and down the stairs. And the ambulance was already outside. So we go up to this room, and there's a little guy laying on the bed all covered with blood, and the ambulance surgeon wrapping up his neck."

"Stabbed?"

"No. Turned out the guy'd tried to cut his throat." The policeman laughed. His teeth were perfectly even and white. "The doctor was telling him to cut along the back of the neck next time."

"That so?" the counterman said, shaking his head and smiling.

"Anyway, I went over and got the dope from the doctor, and we put the guy in the car and took him over to the precinct."

"Not the hospital?"

"No, he'd only lost a little blood, wasn't hurt bad. So we bring him into the precinct, and I put him in a cell, and the lieutenant and the desk officer wait for me. I come back, thinking I didn't make any mistake so far — see, everything I did was being graded — and then the lieutenant asks me how I'm going to dispose of the case, see?"

"That's up to you?"

"Well, yeah, see? I hadn't realized it at the time, but by bringing him into the precinct and booking him, which I had to do to put him in a cell, I'd made it a case, you understand? When I'd had him sign the book I

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hadn't realize it, see, but I'd gone and booked the guy and now a disposition had to be made."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the lieutenant — he's Captain Foley now. You know the captain."

"Oh, sure. Foley."

"Well, he just stands there without cracking a smile and says, 'What're you going to do with the man?' Well, it was a contingency I'd never heard of, so I stumbled around and finally the lieutenant says, 'Now, look. You booked him on attempted suicide, see, and he's booked. I thought you had more sense than to book an attempted suicide, but now you went and did it, so either the guy goes to the asylum or you let him go.' "

"Is that a fact?"

"Yeah, it's the law. So I thought a minute and said I thought we ought to let the guy go. I mean, I was a youngster, y'know, and I . . ."

"Sure. But was he crazy?"

"Wait a minute. The lieutenant doesn't say anything at first, but then he sits me down, see — you know Foley — he sits me down and tells me that if I let him go, see, and he happens to try that stunt again, its my responsibility."

"Why? If a man wants to do away with himself, how . . . ?"

"Well, it's bad judgment on my part, that's all. And it could hold up promotions if somebody wants to get tough about it. I mean it's just a bad thing, see? It's a definite kind of demerit that can hold up a promotion if that's what somebody wants to use it for. It's just not something you want on your record, because it can bounce back and hit you on the chin, see?"

"So what'd you do?"

"Well, I was in a quandary. And I told as much to the lieutenant. But he says, 'You been to college. Go ahead in and see what you think of the guy.' So I go back and sit down in the cell with him. He was laying there half-asleep and he got up and I took a look at him. Very old, y'know? Over seventy. Little Irishman. There he was sitting on the bed with his neck wrapped up, and I told him the story, see?"

"What'd you tell him?"

"Well, I thought I'd use a little psychology. Try to fathom the man. 'Pop,' I said, 'I got a little problem with you. I want you to tell me the truth,' I said. 'I want you to tell me why you did it.' Because I figured if I could find out what made him do it, I'd get an idea whether he'd try it again, see?"

"Very smart."

"But he's not interested. Don't want to talk. So I bull around with him a little, and finally he gets warmed up and tells me. It seems he was alone, see? His kids had all grown up and moved away to all parts of the country. His wife was dead. And he was living on a little pension of some kind, a few dollars a month, and, as he said, it just got to the point, y'know, where he was sick and tired of just looking out the win-

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dow. I mean it's hard to tell it the way he told it to me; there was a man — no friends, no mail, nothing to do, just the days going by, you understand?"

"Sure. It's a pity to be old."

"I mean he told it so — so convincingly that I myself realized that the guy really had something, y'see? I mean the man simply had no reason to live any more. I'll never forget; he said, 'Son, I just got nothin' more to wait for.' "

"That's the truth. There's plenty of them."

"Anyway, he had me there. Because what was I gonna tell him? He went and convinced me, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah."

"So I couldn't do anything else, and I told him. I says, 'Pop, I've got to send you to the asylum.' Well, he jumps up from the bed and grabs hold of my hand and starts to beg, y'know? 'I'm not crazy,' he says, 'I'm not crazy.' And he begs me, begs me not to do that to him. And I realized, I knew damned well, see, that the man was as sane as I was. And I was in a quandary. And there he is pleading with me to let him go, just let him out. But I told him, y'know? I says, 'Look, Pop, I know you're not crazy, but if you pull this stunt again I'm behind the eight ball.' And I explain the situation to him, see? Just as the lieutenant had explained to me. Well . . . the poor guy was just thunderstruck. I'll never forget; he sat down on that bed . . . it's so hard to say it the way he said it . . . 'Officer,' he said — he shook his head like a kid, y'know? — 'Officer, I'd never let you down.' "

"So what'd you do?"

"Well, Mr. Abrams, now that I think back at it I can't believe it, but there was something so right about the guy, it was so pitiful, see, although God knows I'd probably never do it now, but I was green then, and I sprung him. I don't know why I did it, but I did. I went in to the lieutenant and told him to let the guy go. I'll never forget Foley when he looked at me. I swear he thought I'd gone nuts."

"So you let him go, heh?"

"Yeah. I worried about it for a while, because I had ideas in those days — maybe a lieutenancy — and there I'd hung a terrific demerit over my head and it could fall any minute. But after a couple of weeks, what with one thing and another, I forgot about it."

The policeman looked at his chop. The mystery crept into his eyes again. He was smiling at something, something he had not said. The counterman waited. The wind blew, the sign creaked outside and the time passed, and at last the policeman raised his head and took a strange breath as though he were embarrassed and a little sorry he had begun to talk.

"So what happened?" the counterman asked.

"Well . . ." the policeman began, as though dismissing the importance

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of it, "just before, I'm in the car, see? And Dowling next to me. And we get this call for Baxter Street, and no sooner do I turn the corner and see that ambulance than I remember the whole thing. I got out and went inside, and there's all the tenants standing in the hall, and I knew it, I knew it was going to be his room. Sure enough, they point upstairs. So I go up and the first thing I do in the room is look for the razor. See, the last time, the razor was laying right in the middle of the floor. But it wasn't there. I go over to the bed and the doctor's got the stethoscope to him. And the old guy is gasping, y'know? Just pulling in the last couple. So I figured it was a pill this time, see? And there goes the lieutenancy for another ten years. There was nothing to do, so I just stood there kicking myself. Finally the doc stands up and I ask him what the cause of death is going to be. Turns out the guy is just dying, that's all. He was looking at me — the old man — looking right at me, but I don't think he remembered me. But I tell you, I coulda cried. Cause it was really a crummy room, and the building stank. And that poor sucker — imagine him living it all out in there just . . . well, I suppose you might say it was just for me."

He turned his fork over, then dropped it and started buttoning his overcoat. He had not looked into the counterman's eyes for some time. But now he did. "Isn't that peculiar?"

"He was a fine man.

"But the thing is, if the same situation was to start up again tomorrow, I'd never take responsibility for a man like that."

"Well, a man's got to watch out for himself."

"That's the thing."

The policeman got up, paid his check across the counter, and tucked his muffler under his collar. He was staring out at the street. "Peculiar, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is," said the counterman.

"Makes you wonder," the policeman said.

"Yeah," the counterman muttered.

The policeman went to the door, put his hand on the knob, and stood there, staring out at the darkness and the weak glow of light from the swinging sign.

"Well . . . good night," he said, and went out into the cold.

"Q"

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ADRIAN MULLINER, DETECTIVE

by P. G. WODEHOUSE

THE CONVERSATION IN THE BAR parlor of the *Anglers' Rest* had turned to the subject of the regrettably low standard of morality prevalent among the nobility and landed gentry of Great Britain.

Miss Postlethwaite, our erudite barmaid, had brought the matter up by mentioning that in the novelette which she was reading a viscount had just thrown a family solicitor over a cliff.

"Because he had found out his guilty secret," explained Miss Postlethwaite, polishing a glass a little severely, for she was a good woman. "It was his guilty secret this solicitor had found out, so the viscount threw him over a cliff. I suppose, if one did but know, that sort of thing is going on all the time."

Mr. Mulliner nodded gravely.

"So much so," he agreed, "that I believe that whenever a family solicitor is found in two or more pieces at the bottom of a cliff, the first thing the Big Four at Scotland Yard do is make a round-up of all the viscounts in the neighborhood."

"Baronets are worse than viscounts," said a Pint of Stout vehemently. "I was done down by one only last month over the sale of a cow. Shocking sharp he was."

"Earls are worse than baronets," insisted a Whiskey Sour. "I could tell you something about earls."

"How about O.B.E.'s?" demanded a Mild and Bitter. "If you ask me, O.B.E.'s want watching, too."

Mr. Mulliner sighed.

"The fact is," he said, "reluctant though one may be to admit it, the entire British aristocracy is seamed and honeycombed with immorality. I venture to assert that, if you took a pin and jabbed it down anywhere in the pages of *Debrett's Peerage*, you would find it piercing the name of someone who was going about the place with a conscience as tender as a sunburned neck. If anything were needed to prove my assertion, the story of my nephew, Adrian Mulliner, the detective, would do it."

"I didn't know you had a nephew who was a detective," said the Whiskey Sour . . .

Oh, yes. He has retired now, but at one time he was as keen an operator as anyone in the profession. After leaving Oxford and trying his hand at one or two uncongenial tasks, he had found his niche as a member of the firm of Widgery & Boon, Investigators, of Albemarle Street. And it was during his second year with this

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old-established house that he met and loved Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger, younger daughter of the fifth Earl of Brangbolton.

It was the Adventure of the Missing Sealyham that brought the young couple together. From the purely professional standpoint, my nephew has never ranked this among his greatest triumphs of ratiocination; but, considering what it led to, he might well, I think, be justified in regarding it as the most important case of his career. What happened was that he met the animal straying in the park, deduced from the name and address on its collar that it belonged to Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger, of 18A Upper Brook Street, and took it thither at the conclusion of his stroll and restored it.

"Child's play" is the phrase with which, if you happen to allude to it, Adrian Mulliner will always airily dismiss this particular investigation; but Lady Millicent could not have displayed more admiration and enthusiasm had it been the supremest masterpiece of detective work. She fawned on my nephew. She invited him in to tea, consisting of buttered toast, anchovy sandwiches, and two kinds of cake; and at the conclusion of the meal they parted on terms which, even at that early stage in their acquaintance, were something warmer than those of mere friendship.

Indeed, it is my belief that the girl fell in love with Adrian as instantaneously as he with her. On him, it was her radiant blonde beauty that exercised the spell. She, on her side, was fascinated, I fancy, not only by the regularity of his features, which, as is the case with all the Mulliners, was considerable, but also by the fact that he was dark and thin and wore an air of inscrutable melancholy.

This, as a matter of fact, was due to the troublesome attacks of dyspepsia from which he had suffered since boyhood; but to the girl it naturally seemed evidence of a great and romantic soul. Nobody, she felt, could look so grave and sad, had he not hidden deeps in him.

One can see the thing from her point of view. All her life she had been accustomed to brainless juveniles who eked out their meagre eyesight with monocles and, as far as conversation was concerned, were a spent force after they had asked her if she had seen the academy or did she think she would prefer a glass of lemonade. The effect on her of a dark, keen-eyed man like Adrian Mulliner, who spoke well and easily of footprints, psychology, and the underworld, must have been stupendous.

At any rate, their love ripened rapidly. It could not have been two weeks after their first meeting when Adrian, as he was giving her lunch one day at the *Senior Bloodstain*, the detectives' club in Rupert Street, proposed and was accepted. And for the next twenty-four hours, one is safe in saying, there was in the whole of London, including the outlying suburban districts, no happier private investigator than he.

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Next day, however, when he again met Millicent for lunch, he was disturbed to perceive on her beautiful face an emotion which his trained eye immediately recognized as anguish.

"Oh, Adrian," said the girl brokenly. "The worst has happened. My father refuses to hear of our marrying. When I told him we were engaged, he said 'Pooh!' quite a number of times, and added that he had never heard such dashed nonsense in his life. You see, ever since my Uncle Joe's trouble in 1920, Father has had a horror of detectives."

"I don't think I have met your Uncle Joe."

"You will have the opportunity next year. With the usual allowance for good conduct he should be with us again about July. And there is another thing."

"Not another?"

"Yes. Do you know Sir Jasper Addleton, O.B.E.?"

"The financier?"

"Father wants me to marry him. Isn't it awful?"

"I have certainly heard more enjoyable bits of news," agreed Adrian. "This wants a good deal of careful thinking over."

The process of thinking over his unfortunate situation had the effect of rendering excessively acute the pangs of Adrian Mulliner's dyspepsia. During the past two weeks the ecstasy of being with Millicent and deducing that she loved him had caused a complete cessation of the attacks; but now they began again, worse than ever. At length, after a sleepless night during which he experienced all the emotions of one who has carelessly swallowed a family of scorpions, he sought a specialist.

The specialist was one of those keen, modern minds who disdain the outworn formulas of the more conservative mass of the medical profession. He examined Adrian carefully, then sat back in his chair, with the tips of his fingers touching.

"Smile!" he said.

"Eh?" said Adrian.

"Smile, Mr. Mulliner."

"Did you say smile?"

"That's it. Smile."

"But," Adrian pointed out, "I've just lost the only girl I ever loved."

"Well, that's fine," said the specialist, who was a bachelor. "Come on, now, if you please. Start smiling."

Adrian was a little bewildered.

"Listen," he said. "What *is* all this about smiling? We started, if I recollect, talking about my gastric juices. Now, in some mysterious way, we seem to have got onto the subject of smiles. How do you mean — smile? I never smile. I haven't smiled since the butler tripped over the spaniel and upset the melted butter on my Aunt Elizabeth, when I was a boy of twelve."

The specialist nodded.

"Precisely. And that is why your digestive organs trouble you. Dyspepsia," he proceeded, "is now recognized by the progressive element of the profession as purely mental. We do not treat it with drugs and medi-

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cines. Happiness is the only cure. Be gay, Mr. Mulliner. Be cheerful. And, if you can't do that, at any rate smile. The mere exercise of the risible muscles is in itself beneficial. Go out now and make a point, whenever you have a spare moment, of smiling."

"Like this?" said Adrian.

"Wider than that."

"How about this?"

"Better," said the specialist, "but still not quite so elastic as one could desire. Naturally, you need practice. We must expect the muscles to work rustily for a while at their unaccustomed task. No doubt things will brighten by and by."

He regarded Adrian thoughtfully.

"Odd," he said. "A curious smile, yours, Mr. Mulliner. It reminds me a little of the Mona Lisa's. It has the same underlying note of the sardonic and the sinister. It virtually amounts to a leer. Somehow it seems to convey the suggestion that you know all. Fortunately, my own life is an open book, for all to read, and so I was not discommoded. But I think it would be better if, for the present, you endeavored not to smile at invalids or nervous persons. Good morning, Mr. Mulliner. That will be five guineas, precisely."

On Adrian's face, as he went off that afternoon to perform the duties assigned to him by his firm, there was no smile of any description. He shrank from the ordeal before him. He had been told off to guard the wedding presents at a reception in Grosvenor Square, and naturally anything to do with weddings was like a sword through his heart. His face, as he patrolled the room where the gifts were laid out, was drawn and forbidding. Hitherto, at these functions, it had always been his pride that nobody could tell that he was a detective. Today, a child could have recognized his trade. He looked like Sherlock Holmes.

To the gay throng that surged about him he paid little attention. Usually tense and alert on occasions like this, he now found his mind wandering. He mused sadly on Millicent. And suddenly — the result, no doubt, of these gloomy meditations, though a glass of wedding champagne may have contributed its mite — there shot through him, starting at about the third button of his neat waistcoat, a pang of dyspepsia so keen that he felt the pressing necessity of doing something about it immediately.

With a violent effort he contorted his features into a smile. And, as he did so, a stout, bluff man of middle age, with a red face and a gray mustache, who had been hovering near one of the tables, turned and saw him.

"Egad!" he muttered, paling.

Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping, Bart. — for the red-faced man was he — had had a pretty good afternoon. Like all baronets who attend society wedding receptions, he had been going round the various tables since his arrival, pocketing here a

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fish slice, there a jeweled egg boiler, until now he had taken on about all the cargo his tonnage would warrant, and was thinking of strolling off to the pawnbroker's in the Euston Road, with whom he did most of his business. At the sight of Adrian's smile, he froze where he stood, appalled.

We have seen what the specialist thought of Adrian's smile. Even to him, a man of clear and limpid conscience, it had seemed sardonic and sinister. We can picture, then, the effect it must have had on Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping.

At all costs, he felt, he must conciliate this leering man. Swiftly removing from his pockets a diamond necklace, five fish slices, ten cigarette lighters, and a couple of egg boilers, he placed them on the table and came over to Adrian with a nervous little laugh.

"How *are* you, my dear fellow?" he said.

Adrian said that he was quite well. And so, indeed, he was. The specialist's recipe had worked like magic. He was mildly surprised at finding himself so cordially addressed by a man whom he did not remember ever having seen before, but he attributed this to the magnetic charm of his personality.

"That's fine," said the baronet heartily. "That's capital. That's splendid. Er — by the way — I fancied I saw you smile just now."

"Yes," said Adrian. "I did smile. You see ——"

"Of course I see. Of course, my dear fellow. You detected the joke I was playing on our good hostess, and you were amused because you understood that there is no animus, no *arrière-pensée*, behind these little practical pleasantries — nothing but good, clean fun, at which nobody would have laughed more heartily than herself. And now, what are you doing this weekend, my dear old chap? Would you care to run down to my place in Sussex?"

"Very kind of you," began Adrian doubtfully. He was not quite sure that he was in the mood for strange weekends.

"Here is my card, then. I shall expect you on Friday. Quite a small party. Lord Brangbolton, Sir Jasper Addleton, and a few more. Just loafing about, you know, and a spot of bridge at night. Splendid. Capital. See you, then, on Friday."

And carelessly dropping another egg boiler on the table as he passed, Sir Sutton disappeared.

Any doubts which Adrian might have entertained as to accepting the baronet's invitation had vanished as he heard the names of his fellow guests. It always interests a fiancé to meet his fiancée's father and his fiancée's prospective fiancé. For the first time since Millicent had told him the bad news, Adrian became almost cheerful. If, he felt, this baronet had taken such a tremendous fancy to him at first sight, why might it not happen that Lord Brangbolton would be equally drawn to him — to the

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extent, in fact, of overlooking his profession and welcoming him as a son-in-law?

He packed, on the Friday, with what was to all intents and purposes a light heart . . .

A fortunate chance at the very outset of his expedition increased Adrian's optimism. It made him feel that Fate was fighting on his side. As he walked down the platform of Victoria Station, looking for an empty compartment in the train which was to take him to his destination, he perceived a tall, aristocratic old gentleman being assisted into a first-class carriage by a man of butlerine aspect. And in the latter he recognized the servitor who had admitted him to 18A Upper Brook Street, when he visited the house after solving the riddle of the missing sealyham. Obviously, then, the white-haired, dignified passenger could be none other than Lord Brangbolton. And Adrian felt that if on a long train journey he failed to ingratiate himself with the old buster, he had vastly mistaken his amiability and winning fascination of manner.

He leaped in, accordingly, as the train began to move, and the earl, glancing up from his paper, jerked a thumb at the door.

"Get out, blast you!" he said. "Full up."

As the compartment was empty but for themselves, Adrian made no move to comply with the request. Indeed, to alight now, to such an extent had the train gathered speed, would have been impossible. Instead, he spoke cordially.

"Lord Brangbolton, I believe?"

"Go to hell," said his lordship.

"I fancy we are to be fellow guests at Wesping Hall this weekend."

"What of it?"

"I just mentioned it."

"Oh?" said Lord Brangbolton. "Well, since you're here, how about a little flutter?"

As is customary with men of his social position, Millicent's father always traveled with a pack of cards. Being gifted by nature with considerable manual dexterity, he usually managed to do well with these on race trains.

"Ever played Persian Monarchs?" he asked, shuffling.

"I think not," said Adrian.

"Quite simple," said Lord Brangbolton. "You just bet a quid or whatever it may be that you can cut a higher card than the other fellow, and, if you do, you win, and, if you don't, you don't."

Adrian said it sounded a little like Blind Hooky.

"It is like Blind Hooky," said Lord Brangbolton. "Very like Blind Hooky. In fact, if you can play Blind Hooky, you can play Persian Monarchs."

By the time they alighted at Wesping Parva, Adrian was twenty pounds on the wrong side of the ledger. The fact, however, did not prey upon his mind. On the contrary, he was well satisfied with the progress of events. Elated with his winnings, the old earl had become positively cordial, and

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Adrian resolved to press his advantage home at the earliest opportunity.

Arrived at Wesping Hall, accordingly, he did not delay. Shortly after the sounding of the dressing gong he made his way to Lord Brangbolton's room and found him in his bath.

"Might I have a word with you, Lord Brangbolton?" he said.

"You can do more than that," replied the other, with marked amiability. "You can help me find the soap."

"Have you lost the soap?"

"Yes. Had it a minute ago, and now it's gone."

"Strange," said Adrian.

"Very strange," agreed Lord Brangbolton. "Makes a fellow think a bit, that sort of thing happening. My own soap, too. Brought it with me."

Adrian considered.

"Tell me exactly what occurred," he said. "In your own words. And tell me everything, please, for one never knows when the smallest detail may not be important."

His companion marshalled his thoughts.

"My name," he began, "is Reginald Alexander Montacute James Bramfylde Tregennis Shipton-Bellinger, fifth Earl of Brangbolton. On the sixteenth of the present month — today, in fact — I journeyed to the house of my friend Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping, Bart. — here, in short — with the purpose of spending the weekend there. Knowing that Sir Sutton likes to have his guests sweet and fresh about the place, I decided to take a bath before dinner. I unpacked my soap and in a short space of time had lathered myself thoroughly from the neck upwards. And then, just as I was about to get at my right leg, what should I find but that the soap had disappeared. Nasty shock it gave me, I can tell you."

Adrian had listened to this narrative with the closest attention. Certainly the problem appeared to present several points of interest.

"It looks like an inside job," he said thoughtfully. "It could scarcely be the work of a gang. You would have noticed a gang. Just give me the facts briefly once again, if you please."

"Well, I was here, in the bath, as it might be, and the soap was here — between my hands, as it were. Next moment it was gone."

"Are you sure you have omitted nothing?"

Lord Brangbolton reflected.

"Well, I was singing, of course."

A tense look came into Adrian's face.

"Singing what?"

"*Sonny Boy.*"

Adrian's face cleared.

"As I suspected," he said, with satisfaction. "Precisely as I had supposed. I wonder if you are aware, Lord Brangbolton, that in the singing of that particular song the muscles unconsciously contract as you come to the final *boy?* Thus — *I still have you, Sonny Boy.* You observe? It would be impossible for anyone, rendering the number with the proper gusto, not to

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force his hands together at this point, assuming that they were in anything like close juxtaposition. And if there were any slippery object between them, such as a piece of soap, it would inevitably shoot sharply upwards and fall" — he scanned the room keenly — "outside the bath on the mat. As, indeed," he concluded, picking up the missing object and restoring it to its proprietor, "it did."

Lord Brangbolton gaped.

"Well, dash my buttons," he cried, "if that isn't the smartest bit of work I've seen in a month of Sundays!"

"Elementary," said Adrian with a shrug.

"You ought to be a detective."

Adrian took the cue.

"I am a detective," he said. "My name is Mulliner."

For an instant the words did not appear to have made any impression. The aged peer continued to beam through the soapsuds. Then suddenly his geniality vanished with an ominous swiftness.

"Mulliner? Did you say Mulliner?"

"I did."

"You aren't by any chance the feller ——"

"— who loves your daughter Millicent with a fervor he cannot begin to express? Yes, Lord Brangbolton, I am. And I am hoping that I may receive your consent to the match."

A hideous scowl had darkened the earl's brow. His fingers, which were grasping a loofah, tightened convulsively.

"Oh?" he said. "You are, are you? You imagine, do you, that I propose to welcome a blighted footprint-and-cigar-ash inspector into my family? It is your idea, is it, that I shall acquiesce in the union of my daughter to a dashed feller who goes about the place on his hands and knees with a magnifying glass, picking up small objects and putting them carefully away in his pocketbook? I seem to see myself! Why, rather than permit Millicent to marry a bally detective ——"

"What is your objection to detectives?"

"Never you mind what's my objection to detectives. Marry my daughter, indeed! I like your infernal cheek. Why, you couldn't keep her in lipsticks."

Adrian preserved his dignity.

"I admit that my services are not so amply remunerated as I could wish, but the firm hints at a rise next Christmas ——"

"Tchah!" said Lord Brangbolton. "Pshaw! If you are interested in my daughter's matrimonial arrangements, she is going, as soon as he gets through with this Bramah-Yamah Gold Mines flotation of his, to marry my old friend Jasper Addleton. As for you, Mr. Mulliner, I have only two words to say to you. One is POP, the other is OFF. And do it now."

Adrian sighed. He saw that it would be hopeless to endeavor to argue with the haughty old man in his present mood.

"So be it, Lord Brangbolton," he said quietly.

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And affecting not to notice the nailbrush which struck him smartly on the back of the head, he left the room.

The food and drink provided for his guests by Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping at the dinner which began some half-hour later were all that the veriest gourmet could have desired; but Adrian gulped them down, scarcely tasting them. His whole attention was riveted on Sir Jasper Addleton, who sat immediately opposite him.

And the more he examined Sir Jasper, the more revolting seemed the idea of Sir Jasper's marrying the girl he loved. Of course, an ardent young fellow inspecting a man who is going to marry the girl he loves is always a stern critic. In the peculiar circumstances Adrian would, no doubt, have looked askance at a John Barrymore or a Ronald Colman. But, in the case of Sir Jasper, it must be admitted that he had quite reasonable grounds for his disapproval.

In the first place, there was enough of the financier to make two financiers. It was as if Nature, planning a financier, had said to itself: "We will do this thing well. We will not skimp," with the result that, becoming too enthusiastic, it had overdone it. And then, in addition to being fat, he was also bald and goggle-eyed. And if you overlooked his baldness and the goggly protuberance of his eyes, you could not get away from the fact that he was well advanced in years. Such a man, felt Adrian, would have been better employed in pricing burial lots in Kensal Green Cemetery than in forcing his unwelcome attentions on a sweet young girl like Millicent; and as soon as the meal was concluded he approached him with cold abhorrence.

"A word with you," he said, and led him out on to the terrace.

The O.B.E., as he followed him into the cool night air, seemed surprised and a little uneasy. He had noticed Adrian scrutinizing him closely across the dinner table, and if there is one thing a financier who has just put out a prospectus of a gold mine dislikes, it is to be scrutinized closely.

"What do you want?" he asked nervously.

Adrian gave him a cold glance.

"Do you ever look in a mirror, Sir Jasper?" he asked curtly.

"Frequently," replied the financier, puzzled.

"Do you ever weigh yourself?"

"Often."

"Do you ever listen while your tailor is toiling round you with the tape measure and calling out the score to his assistant?"

"I do."

"Then," said Adrian, "and I speak in the kindest spirit of disinterested friendship, you must have realized that you are an overfed old boliunkus. And how you ever got the idea that you were a fit mate for Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger frankly beats me. Surely it must have occurred to you

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what a priceless ass you will look, walking up the aisle with that young and lovely girl at your side?"

The O.B.E. bridled.

"Ho!" he said.

"It is no use saying 'Ho!' " said Adrian. "You can't get out of it with any 'Ho's.' When all the talk and argument have died away, the fact remains that, millionaire though you be, you are a nasty-looking, fat, senile millionaire. If I were you, I should give the whole thing a miss. What do you want to get married for, anyway? You are much happier as you are. Besides, think of the risks of a financier's life. Nice it would be for that sweet girl suddenly to get a wire from you telling her not to wait dinner for you as you had just started a seven-year stretch at Dartmoor!"

An angry retort had been trembling on Sir Jasper's lips during the early portion of this speech, but at these concluding words it died unspoken. He blenched visibly.

"What do you mean?" he faltered.

"Never mind," said Adrian.

He had spoken, of course, purely at a venture, basing his remarks on the fact that nearly all O.B.E.'s who dabble in High Finance go to prison sooner or later. Of Sir Jasper's actual affairs he knew nothing.

"Hey, listen!" said the financier.

But Adrian did not hear him. I have mentioned that during dinner, preoccupied with his thoughts, he had bolted his food. Nature now took its toll. An acute spasm suddenly ran through him, and with a brief "Ouch!" of pain he doubled up and began to walk round in circles.

Sir Jasper clicked his tongue impatiently.

"This is no time for doing the Astaire pom-pom dance," he said sharply. "Tell me what you meant by that stuff you were talking about prison."

Adrian had straightened himself. In the light of the moon which flooded the terrace with its silver beams, his clean-cut face was plainly visible. And with a shiver of apprehension Sir Jasper saw that it wore a sardonic, sinister smile — a smile which, it struck him, was virtually tantamount to a leer.

I have spoken of the dislike financiers have for being scrutinized closely. Still more vehemently do they object to being leered at. Sir Jasper reeled, and was about to press his question when Adrian, still smiling, tottered off into the shadows and was lost to sight.

The financier hurried into the smoking room, where he knew there would be the materials for a stiff drink. A stiff drink was what he felt an imperious need of at the moment. He tried to tell himself that that smile could not really have had the inner meaning which he had read into it; but he was still quivering as he entered the smoking room.

As he opened the door, the sound of an angry voice smote his ears. He recognized it as Lord Brangbolton's.

"I call it dashed low," his lordship was saying in his high-pitched tenor.

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Sir Jasper gazed in bewilderment. His host, Sir Sutton Hartley-Wesping, was standing backed against the wall, and Lord Brangbolton, tapping him on the shirtfront with a piston-like forefinger, was plainly in the process of giving him a thorough ticking off.

"What's the matter?" asked the financier.

"I'll tell you what's the matter," cried Lord Brangbolton. "This hound here has got down a detective to watch his guests. A dashed fellow named Mulliner. So much," he said bitterly, "for our boasted English hospitality. If I have a few of my society chums down to my little place for a visit, naturally I chain up the hairbrushes and tell the butler to count the spoons every night, but I'd never dream of going so far as to employ beastly detectives. One has one's code. *Noblesse*, I mean to say, *oblige*, what, what?"

"But, listen," pleaded the baronet. "I keep telling you. I had to invite the fellow here. I thought that if he had eaten my bread and salt, he would not expose me."

"How do you mean, expose you?"

Sir Sutton coughed.

"Oh, it was nothing. The merest trifle. Still, the man undoubtedly could have made things unpleasant for me, if he had wished. So, when I looked up and saw him smiling at me in that frightful sardonic way——"

Sir Jasper Addleton uttered a sharp cry.

"Smiling! Did you say smiling?"

"Smiling," said the baronet, "is right. It was one of those smiles that seem to go right through you and light up all your inner being as if with a searchlight."

Sir Jasper gulped again.

"Is this fellow — this smiler fellow — is he a tall, dark, thin chap?"

"That's right. He sat opposite you at dinner."

"And he's a detective?"

"He is," said Lord Brangbolton. "As shrewd and smart a detective," he added grudgingly, " as I ever met in my life. The way he found that soap . . . Feller struck me as having some sort of a sixth sense, if you know what I mean, dash and curse him. I hate detectives," he said with a shiver. "They give me the creeps. This one wants to marry Millicent, of all the dashed nerve!"

"See you later," said Sir Jasper. And with a single bound he was out of the room and on his way to the terrace. There was no time to waste. With one hand he drew from his inside pocket a check book, with the other from his trouser pocket a fountain pen.

Adrian, when the financier found him, was feeling a good deal better. He blessed the day when he had sought out the specialist. Smiling might make the cheek muscles ache, but it undoubtedly did the trick.

For a brief while before Sir Jasper burst onto the terrace, waving fountain pen and check book, Adrian had been giving his face a rest. But now, the pain in his cheeks having abated,

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he deemed it prudent to resume the treatment. And so it came about that the financier, hurrying towards him, was met with a smile so meaning, so suggestive, that he stopped in his tracks.

"Oh, there you are!" he said, recovering at length. "Might I have a word with you in private?"

Adrian nodded, beaming. The financier took him by the coat sleeve and led him across the terrace.

"I've been thinking things over," he said, "and I've come to the conclusion that you were right."

"Right?" said Adrian.

"About marrying. It wouldn't do."

"No?"

"Positively not. Absurd. I can see it now. I'm too old for the girl."

"Yes."

"Too bald."

"Exactly."

"And too fat."

"Much too fat," agreed Adrian. This sudden change of heart puzzled him, but none the less the other's words were as music to his ears. Every syllable the O.B.E. had spoken had caused his heart to leap within him like a young lamb in springtime, and his mouth curved in a smile.

Sir Jasper, seeing it, shied like a frightened horse.

"So I have decided," he said, "to take your advice and — if I recall your expression — give the thing a miss."

"You couldn't do better," said Adrian heartily.

"Now, if I were to remain in England in these circumstances," proceeded Sir Jasper, "there might be unpleasantness. So I propose to go quietly away at once to some remote spot — say, South America. Don't you think I am right?" he asked, giving the check book a twitch.

"Quite right," said Adrian.

"You won't mention this little plan of mine? If any of your cronies at Scotland Yard should express curiosity as to my whereabouts, you will plead ignorance?"

"Certainly."

"Capital!" said Sir Jasper, relieved. "And there is one other thing. I gather from Brangbolton that you are anxious to marry Lady Millicent yourself. And as by the time of the wedding I shall doubtless be in — well, Callao is a spot that suggests itself offhand — I would like to give you my little wedding present now."

He scribbled hastily in his check book, tore out a page and handed it to Adrian.

"Remember!" he said. "Not a word to anyone!"

"Quite," said Adrian.

He watched the financier disappear in the direction of the garage, regretting that he could have misjudged a man who so evidently had much good in him. Presently the sound of a motor engine announced that the other was on his way. Feeling that one obstacle, at least, between himself and his happiness had been removed, Adrian strolled indoors to the rest of the party.

It was a quiet, peaceful scene that

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met his eyes as he wandered into the library. Overruling the request of some of the members of the company for a rubber of bridge, Lord Brangbolton had gathered them together at a small table and was initiating them into his favorite game of Persian Monarchs.

"It's perfectly simple, dash it," he was saying. "You just take the pack and cut. You bet — let us say ten pounds — that you will cut a higher card than the feller you're cutting against. And if you do, you win, dash it. And if you don't, the other dashed feller wins. Quite clear, what?"

Somebody said that it sounded a little like Blind Hooky.

"It is like Blind Hooky," said Lord Brangbolton. "Very like Blind Hooky. In fact, if you can play Blind Hooky, you can play Persian Monarchs."

They settled down to their game, and Adrian wandered about the room, endeavoring to still the riot of emotion which his recent interview with Sir Jasper Addleton had aroused in his bosom. All that remained for him to do now, he reflected, was by some means or other to remove the existing prejudice against him from Lord Brangbolton's mind.

It would not be easy, of course. To begin with, there was the matter of his straitened means.

He suddenly remembered that he had not yet looked at the check which the financier had handed him. He pulled it out of his pocket.

And having glanced at it, Adrian Mulliner swayed like a poplar in a storm.

Just what he had expected, he could not have said. A fiver, possibly. At the most, a tenner. Just a trifling gift, he had imagined, with which to buy himself a cigarette lighter, a fish slice, or an egg boiler.

The check was for a hundred thousand pounds.

So great was the shock that, as Adrian caught sight of himself in the mirror opposite to which he was standing, he scarcely recognized the face in the glass. He seemed to be seeing it through a mist. Then the mist cleared, and he saw not only his own face clearly, but also that of Lord Brangbolton, who was in the act of cutting against his left-hand neighbor, Lord Knubble of Knopp.

And as he thought of the effect this sudden accession of wealth must surely have on the father of the girl he loved, there came into Adrian's face a sudden, swift smile.

And simultaneously from behind him he heard a gasping exclamation, and, looking in the mirror, he met Lord Brangbolton's eyes. Always a little prominent, they were now almost prawn-like in their convexity.

Lord Knubble of Knopp had produced a banknote from his pocket and was pushing it along the table.

"Another ace!" he exclaimed. "Well, I'm dashed!"

Lord Brangbolton had risen from his chair.

"Excuse me," he said in a strange, croaking voice. "I just want to have

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a little chat with my friend Mulliner here. Might I have a word in private with you, Mr. Mulliner?"

There was silence between the two men until they had reached a corner of the terrace out of earshot of the library window. Then Lord Brangbolton cleared his throat.

"Mulliner," he began, "or, rather — what is your Christian name?"

"Adrian."

"Adrian, my dear fellow," said Lord Brangbolton, "my memory is not what it should be, but I seem to have a distinct recollection that, when I was in my bath before dinner, you said something about wanting to marry my daughter Millicent."

"I did," replied Adrian. "And if your objections to me as a suitor were mainly financial, let me assure you that, since we last spoke, I have become a wealthy man."

"I never had any objections to you, Adrian, financial or otherwise," said Lord Brangbolton, patting his arm affectionately. "I have always felt that the man my daughter married ought to be a fine, warm-hearted young fellow like you. For you, Adrian," he proceeded, "are essentially warmhearted. You would never dream of distressing a father-in-law by mentioning any . . . any little . . . well, in short, I saw from your smile in there that you had noticed that I was introducing into that game of Blind Hooky — or, rather, Persian Monarchs — certain little — shall I say variations? — designed to give it additional interest and excitement, and I feel sure that you would scorn to embarrass a father-in-law by . . . Well, to cut a long story short, my boy, take Millicent and with her a father's blessing."

He extended his hand. Adrian clasped it warmly.

"I am the happiest man in the world," he said, smiling.

Lord Brangbolton winced.

"Do you mind not doing that?" he said.

"I only smiled," said Adrian.

"I know," said Lord Brangbolton.

Little remains to be told. Adrian and Millicent were married three months later at a fashionable West End church. The service was conducted by the Very Reverend the Dean of Bittlesham.

It was in the vestry afterwards, as Adrian looked at Millicent, and seemed to realize for the first time that all his troubles were over and that this lovely girl was indeed his, that a full sense of his happiness swept over the young man.

All through the ceremony he had been grave, as befitted a man at the most serious point of his career. But now, fizzing as if with some spiritual yeast, he clasped her in his arms, and over her shoulder his face broke into a quick smile.

He found himself looking into the eyes of the Dean of Bittlesham. A moment later he felt a tap on his arm.

"Might I have a word with you in private, Mr. Mulliner?" said the dean in a low voice.

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OR EVEN FADE AWAY . . .

Every once in a while we bring you a frankly old-fashioned story. We like an occasional old-fashioned tale, and we hope you share this nostalgia with us — a nostalgia for thrillers out of the past, especially from that rich and redolent period of detective-story writing just before and just after the turn of the century. Well, here is an old-fashioned story with a difference. For one thing, it is a previously unreprinted exploit of Jacques Futrelle's The Thinking Machine — and who among us, with a spark of auld lang syne still in our hearts, can resist a "new" case involving that wonderful old wizard, The Thinking Machine? For another thing — well, suppose we tell you the unusual circumstances which gave birth to "The Grinning God" and its sequel, "The House That Was" . . .

Back in 1907, there was a tremendous vogue in American magazines for the ghost story, but all the stories were strictly supernatural, with no pretense at any answer or explanation. Mrs. Futrelle (most of us are inclined to forget that May Futrelle was a well-known author in her own right; in fact, her very first story appeared in "The Saturday Evening Post") — well, Mrs. Futrelle decided to buck the trend: she wrote a ghost story that potentially had a logical explanation.

The story was shown to the editor who at that time was buying all the Jacques Futrelle stories about The Thinking Machine. The editor liked Mrs. Futrelle's unorthodox ghost story, but he couldn't see any possible explanation, and he was afraid that if he couldn't, the public couldn't.

At this point, Jacques Futrelle stepped into the picture. The Thinking Machine, that infallible logician, could surely solve the mystery of "The Grinning God." The editor saw enormous possibilities at once: a two-part story, the first part written by Mrs. Futrelle, and posing a seemingly out-and-out supernatural problem; and the second part written by the famous creator of The Thinking Machine, in which his master sleuth finds a perfectly natural solution to the supernatural mystery.

While May and Jacques Futrelle had vowed that they would never collaborate (as so many husband-and-wife author-teams were doing at that time, and have done since), the set-up was too much of a "natural" to pass up — and besides, the wily editor, who knew a good thing when

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he thought of it, made the Futrelles such an attractive proposition financially that, as Mrs. Futrelle wrote us, "the money, of course, settled the matter."

The collaborative venture proved a huge success — it became one of the sensational stories of the day. Even George Horace Lorimer of the SEP was impressed — so much so that he asked the Futrelles to write another two-parter for him. But this never materialized: Mrs. Futrelle found that she didn't have a ghost of another ghost-idea in her creative system, and of course Jacques Futrelle was under contract to write as many stories about The Thinking Machine as he could think up — during the first decade of the twentieth century, The Thinking Machine was probably the most popular detective character in American newspapers and magazines.

The years come and go. Nearly fifty of them have gone the way of all years since the double Futrelle story first appeared in print. But old stories don't always lose their charm, and some of them never die, or even, like old soldiers, fade away . . .

THE GRINNING GOD

by MAY FUTRELLE

PROFESSOR AUGUSTUS S. F. X. VAN Dusen — The Thinking Machine — readjusted his thick spectacles, dropped back into the depths of the huge chair, and read from the manuscript in his hand: "A little less than three months ago I had a photograph taken. As I look upon it now, I see a man of about 30 years, clean-shaven, full-faced, and vigorous with health; eyes which are clear and calm, almost phlegmatic; a brow upon which sits the serenity of perfect physical and mental poise; a pleasant mouth with quizzical lines about the corners; a chin with determination and assurance in every line; hair brown and unmarked with age. I was red-blooded then, lusty, and buoyant with life, while now —

"Here is a hand mirror. It reflects back at me the gaunt, haggard face of a man who might be 60 years old; furtive, shifting eyes in which lies a perpetual, hideous fear; a brow ruffled over into spidery lines of suffering; a drooping, flabby mouth; hair dead white over the temples. My blood has become water; all things worthwhile are gone. I have nothing left.

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"Fear, Webster says, is apprehension, dread, alarm — and yet it is more than that. It is a loss of the sense of proportion, an unseating of mental power; a vampire which saps hope and courage and common sense, and leaves a quivering shell of what was once a man. I know what fear is — no man better. I knew it that night in the forest, and I know it now, when I find myself sitting up in bed staring into nothingness, with the echo of screams in my ears; I knew it when that grim, silent old man moved about me, and I know it now when without conscious effort my imagination conjures up those dead, glassy eyes; I knew it when vicious little tongues of flame lapped at me that night, and I know it now when at times I still seem to feel their heat.

"Yes, I know what fear is. It is typified by a little ivory god which squats on my mantel as I write, squats there grinning. Perhaps there is some explanation for what happened that night, some single hidden fact which, if revealed, would make it all clear; but in seeking that explanation I have grown like this. When it will end, I don't know — I can only wait and listen . . .

"Here is my terrifying story. Impatient, half-famished, and disgusted at a sudden failure of my gasoline supply, I ran my automobile off the main roadway and brought it to a standstill in a small open space before a little country store. I had barely been able to see the outlines of the building in the darkness — a darkness which was momentarily growing more dense. Black, threatening clouds swooped across the face of the heavens, first obscuring, then obliterating, the brilliant star-points.

"I knew where I was, although I had never been over the road before. Behind me lay Pelham, a quiet little village which had been sound asleep when I drove through, and somewhere vaguely ahead was the town of Millen. I had been due there about seven o'clock; but owing to unforeseeable delays, it was now about ten. I was exhausted from hours at the steering wheel, and had had nothing to eat since luncheon. I planned to spend the night in Millen, eat a big meal, store up a few hours' sleep, then on the morrow proceed on my way.

"This was what I had intended to do. But an empty gasoline tank brought me to a stop in front of the forbidding little store, and a little maneuvering back and forth cleared the road's fairway of the bulk of my machine. No light showed in the store; but as I had not passed another building for two or three miles back, it seemed not improbable that the keeper of the store slept on the premises. I put this hypothesis to a test by a loud helloing, which in the course of time brought a nightcapped head to a window just above the door.

"'Got any gasoline?' I asked.

"'I cal'late as how I might have a little,' came the answer in a man's voice.

"'Well, will you please let me have enough to get to Millen?'

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" 'It's ag'in' the law in these parts to draw gasoline at night,' said the man placidly. 'Cal'late as how you'll have to wait till mornin'.'

" 'Wait till morning?' I complained. 'Why, man, there's a storm coming! I've got to get to Millen.'

" 'Can't help that,' was the reply. 'Law's law, you know.'

"Here was another dilemma, unexpected as it was annoying. The tone of the voice left no room for argument, and I knew the obstinacy of this man's type. I was prepared, therefore, to accept the inevitable.

" 'Well, if you can't sell me any gasoline tonight, can you give me a bite to eat and put me up till morning? I can't stay out in this storm.'

" 'Ain't got no room,' explained the man. 'Jus' enough space up here for me an' the dog, an' he kinder crowds.'

" 'Well, something must be done,' I insisted. 'What is the price of your gasoline?'

" 'Twenty-five cents a gallon in day time.'

" 'Well, how about 50 cents a gallon at night?' I went on.

"The whitecapped head was withdrawn, and the window banged down suddenly. For a moment I thought I had hopelessly offended some puritanical old man of the woods; but then a light glowed inside the store, and the front door opened. I stepped inside. The light came from a safety lantern in the hands of a shrunken little old man, who proceeded to draw the gasoline.

" 'How far is it to Millen?' I inquired casually.

" 'Cal'late as how it's about five miles.'

" 'Straight road?'

" 'Straight 'cept where it bends,' he replied. 'They ain't no turn out nor nothin'. You can't go wrong 'less you climb a fence.'

"The gasoline was drawn and paid for, after which the old man accompanied me to the automobile with his safety lantern. He stood looking on curiously while I filled the tank.

" ' 'Pears to be a right smart storm comin' up,' he remarked consolingly.

"I glanced upward. Every starpoint was lost now behind an impenetrable veil of black; there was a whispering, sighing sound of wind in the trees.

" 'I think I can beat the storm into Millen,' I replied hopefully.

" 'I cal'late as how you oughter,' responded the old man. 'Ain't no thunder an' lightnin' yet, an' I cal'late as how they'll be a pile of it before it rains.'

"I handed back the empty gasoline can, then got into my car.

" 'If I should get caught before I get to Millen, is there any place I might stop?' I inquired.

" 'I cal'late as how you might stop anywhere,' the old man chuckled, 'but they ain't no houses nor nothin'. They ain't no turnouts, an' you can hit it up as fast as you want to. You'll be all right.'

"A sudden gust of wind brought a

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cloud of dust upon us, and the thinly clad old man scampered off into the house.

"I backed my car, then straightened out into the road, a wide yellow stretch as smooth as asphalt. Then I stepped hard on the accelerator, and went plunging off into the night.

"It might have been only my imagination, or it might have been, as the car swept on, that I thought I heard someone calling me; I'll never know which. But the lowering clouds and a quickened rush of wind did not make another stop inviting; so the car sped on.

"I knew an excellent little all-night restaurant in Millen, and was speculating pleasantly as to whether it should be a chop and a mug of ale, or a more substantial steak and potatoes. I was aroused from this dreaming when suddenly the glittering lamps of my car showed me, straight ahead, a fork in the road. Two roads! Here was another unexpected annoyance. I brought the automobile to a stop, in doubt and perplexity.

"To the right, one fork ran into the thickening forest, as far as the light gleams revealed; to the left, the fork seemed a little more marked, as if more traveled, and where the light melted into the enveloping blackness it appeared to widen. I leaped out of the car and went forward, seeking a guidepost or something to show my way. There was nothing.

"Then I remembered that I had a road map in my pocket. Of course that would tell me. A grumble of thunder came from far off as I drew near the car to examine the map in the light. Here was Pelham, and here was Millen; here was the little store where I stopped, marked with a star, which meant that gasoline was to be procured there. Now I was somewhere between that store and Millen. The map was a large one. It should show not only the main road, but every little bypath that cut away from it. Yet from the little store to Millen the road on the map was an unbroken line. There was no branching off, and yet here was an unmistakable fork in the road.

"I was perplexed, impatient, and incidentally starving; so hastily I made up my mind which road to take — the left, the more used one. Heaping maledictions upon the head of the man who drew that particular map, I started to get into the car again when the darkness was suddenly torn by a vivid flash of lightning. It startled me, blinded me almost, and was followed instantly by the crash and roar of thunder.

"Then came another sound — a curdling, nerve-racking scream — a scream of agony, of pain, of fear which seemed to stop my heart for one fearful instant, then was lost in the thunder of the approaching storm. Suddenly all was silent again, save for the wind as it whipped its way through the forest.

"I was not a nervous man; so after the first shock the blood rushed back to my heart, my head cleared, and I was perfectly calm. But I stood wait-

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ing — waiting and listening. I argued calmly. Someone was evidently in distress. But where? In what direction? The singing wind, the whirling dust, left me no guess. And then came that scream again, this time a series of quick, sharp shrieks ending in a wail which made me clench my hands.

"But now I had the direction. The cries had come apparently from the road, somewhere behind me. I walked to the rear of the car where the tail-light shot out a feeble ray, and stood peering off in the direction from which I had come. At first I could distinguish nothing; then a white, intangible something slowly grew out of the night, — something hazy, floating, indistinct, yet unmistakably something. Fascinated, I stood still and continued to stare. The floating white figure seemed to grow larger and clearer. It was coming toward me; it would cross the path of the tail-light in another moment. I caught my breath and waited.

"Suddenly the reverberating crash of thunder sounded again, nearer and louder, but unaccompanied by lightning. Instantly, as if in echo, came that scream again. Obviously it was someone in distress — a woman perhaps, lost in the woods and in terror of the approaching storm. If this was true, there was only one thing to do: go to her relief.

"I took a flashlight from the car and started back along the road to where I had seen the figure. With the light thrust straight out in front of me at arm's length, I ran back ten yards, twenty, fifty — and saw nothing. I screened the light with my hand and peered about in the gloom, and saw — nothing.

"A panic was growing upon me. I flashed the light to the right, to the left, and it showed only the gaunt, silent trees, straight ahead of me along the yellow road, and behind me toward the automobile. But there was nothing else — absolutely nothing. I rushed back to the car; but no one was there. I called aloud; but the forest gave back only the sound of my own voice, mingled with the swishing of the wind.

"Then I stopped still once more, and listened. For a long time I stood there, light in hand, until the silence grew more terrifying than the screams had been. Finally I turned and walked back to the car. Somehow, the car gave me confidence. I struck the hood with my open palm, and laughed at my unreasoning terror. I had heard the screams, yes; I had seen a floating white figure. There was nothing very remarkable about it — it was a thing that could be explained, I was sure of that now.

"So, deliberately, I searched the road again, this time with the light turned toward the ground. I went along, stooping, seeking footprints. I found none. But I could explain even that: the wind must have covered them with dust.

"I straightened up suddenly. Something had sounded, something louder than the rustling of the leaves, louder

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even than the creaking of the trees. It was a crackling sound — a sound that might have been made by a foot pressing on dry twigs. It seemed to be to the left, and I turned the light in that direction. Grotesque shadows danced and swayed as the trees reeled about me. Then high up where the light straggled through the branches I saw something white — dead white!

"I cleared the road in a few strides and plunged into the forest with the light turned upward. I stumbled over rocks half-buried in the leaves; I slipped once into a ditch which I couldn't see. Finally my foot struck a fallen tree, and I went sprawling on my hands and knees. The flashlight rolled beyond my reach, and blackness swooped down as the light was smothered in the underbrush. As I groped for it I again heard that crackling sound, as of breaking twigs.

"At last, my frantic fingers closed on the light, and I shot the beam high above my head, seeking that white something up among the trees. It was gone. I paused to wipe the perspiration from my brow, and loosened my collar. A sudden shower of leaves came down upon my head; there was another zigzag of lightning, a nearby roll of thunder, and the sinister patter of raindrops falling about me like leaden bullets. The storm had burst.

"I stumbled back to the automobile, got in, and sent it forward headlong on the road to the left — the road which bore evidence of travel. The pace was furious; for somewhere behind me was a misty, floating figure of white, and somewhere a woman screaming. Suddenly the road widened where a path cut through the dense wood. A single sidelong glance at it as I rushed past told me it was not wide enough for my car. Again the road map was at fault. I remembered that grimly, even as the automobile went splashing along through growing pools of water and invisible ruts. I clung grimly to the steering wheel with only one idea in mind: to get to Millen.

"Gradually the road turned toward the left, or so it seemed to me. But that too might have been the effect of an overwrought imagination. The road did not look so much traveled now, despite the deceptive ruts into which my wheels kept sinking. Yet beneath its sheet of water the steadily gleaming lights showed that there was a road, plainly marked. For a minute or more I went straight on, desperately, recklessly; then an illuminating flash across the sky showed me that I was plunging into open country and that the forest was gradually receding.

"Finally, through the swirling, drenching rain, I saw a faint rosy point in the distance. Whatever it was — a lantern, I supposed — it indicated the presence of some fellow human being. I drove straight toward it. The gleam did not falter or fade. Another dazzling burst of lightning answered my question as to the nature of the light. It was in a farmhouse — a farmhouse out here where there

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weren't supposed to be any farmhouses! But at least it would serve to shelter me from the fury of the storm. I took it all in at one glance, even to a small shed in the rear where I could park the car.

"I didn't pause to call out as I drew near, but drove directly to the shed and ran my car in. Then, guided by the constant lightning flashes, I walked round to the front of the farmhouse, passing through the stream of light from the window. It cheered me, that light. I knocked on the front door loudly, shaking the water from my dripping garments. I waited — waited patiently for half a minute. There was no answering sound of any sort, and again I knocked, this time more insistently. Still no answer. It was not difficult to imagine that the continuous roar of the elements had drowned my knocking, so I repeated the performance, thumping loudly. Still no answer.

"Even in this desperate strait I did not care to enter the house as a thief might, by forcing my way, and run the risk of being received as a thief, possibly with a bullet. So I stepped down from the veranda, and went to the lighted window, intending to attract attention by rapping on the glass. My first glimpse told me no one was there; but the room indicated every evidence of occupancy. A big cheerful log fire was burning, and its flickering light showed books here and there, inviting chairs, a table, and all the little knickknacks that make a comfortable living-room.

"I had no further scruples about it. I ran up the steps, and was just reaching out my hand to try the knob, when the latch clicked, and slowly, silently, the door swung open. Naturally, I expected to meet someone — someone who had anticipated me in lifting the latch — but I saw no one. The door had merely opened, revealing a long, broad hallway, with a stair in the distance, and unlighted save for the reflection from the living-room. I took just two steps across the threshold, enough to get out of the swirling rain, then stopped and called. No one answered. I called a second time. The thunder was silent just then, and there was no sound save that of my own voice. I ventured along the hall to the living-room door and looked in. It was cozy, warm, even more comfortable than I had imagined when I looked in through the window.

"All at once I was overcome by a guilty sense of intrusion. What right had I to enter a strange house at this time of night, even to get out of a storm? My personal safety seemed at stake, somehow. I turned and started back for the door by which I had entered, with the intention of remaining there till in some way I could attract the attention of the occupants of the house.

"But I didn't reach the door: for directly in front of me stood a man. He was tall, angular, aged, and a little bent. A straggling gray beard almost covered his face, and thick gray hair hung down limply from beneath the

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brim of an old slouch hat. He was beside me, almost within reach of my hand, almost treading upon my toes with his great boots, and yet I had not heard a single sound of his coming.

" 'I must apologize —' I began; but I got no further. He had not heard me, had not even seen me, to judge by the manner in which he walked slowly past me with his chin upon his breast, his hands clasped behind his back. I stepped back to avoid a collision.

" 'I beg your pardon —' I began again; but he had disappeared into the living-room, stalked away noiselessly without even a glance in my direction, leaving me overcome by that indefinable sense of impending danger.

"I paused there in the hall and considered the situation. Surely the old man must have seen me; yet — yet —

" 'I'm going in there, and I am going to stay until the storm is over!' I told myself.

"I removed my coat, hung it on a peg, walked along the hallway, and stepped into the living-room.

"*It was deserted!*

"There are moments in every man's life when the weight of a revolver in his hand is tremendously reassuring. This was mine. I drew the weapon from my hip pocket, examined it, and thrust it into my coat within easy reach of my right hand. Then I stood by the table, drumming my fingers on it idly, and debating with myself as to what I should do. I was looking toward the door by which I had entered. No one came in, and yet —

"Suddenly the gray-bearded old man was throwing a log on the fire. The flames shot up and the sparks flew; but there was not the crackle of fresh burning wood as there should have been — just this silent old man. My heart was in my throat, and I laughed sheepishly.

" 'You startled me,' I explained foolishly.

"He did not look at me, but busied himself about the room for a moment, and laid his hat upon a couch. Then he went out by the door into the hallway.

" 'Well, upon my soul!' I exclaimed.

"I sat down and deliberately waited for the old man to return. The uncanniness of it all was growing upon me — the silence of his great boots as he walked, the fire which didn't crackle as it burned, the lack of any sign or movement to indicate that he had recognized my presence. Was the old man real? I came to my feet with an exclamation. Or was it — was it some weird continuation of that horrible business in the forest?

"I put out a cold, clammy hand to the fire. That seemed real — at least, a warmth came to me, and gradually my fingers lost their numbness, and looking upon my own hand I fell to remembering the hands of my strange host. They were knotted, toil-worn, and the left forefinger was missing. That fact struck sharply upon my memory, and I remembered also a scar over one eye when he removed his hat. That seemed real too, as did these things on the mantel in front of

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me: an empty spool; an alabaster cat, glaringly red and white; a piece of crystal of peculiar shape on the farthermost corner. And near it, so close that at first it seemed a part of it, was a queer little ivory god, sitting on his haunches, grinning.

"I lifted the ivory image and examined it curiously. It was real enough. I had stepped back from the mantel a pace to let the firelight fall upon it, when suddenly I knew that the old man had returned. I didn't hear him, I hadn't seen him — I merely knew he was there. I felt it. I slipped the little image into my pocket involuntarily as I turned; for all my interest was instantly transferred to a tray of food which the old man carried. And I remembered I was hungry.

"He placed the things on the table in the same ghostly silence. There was a jug of milk, some jelly, a little pat of butter, and several biscuits. I went forward and thanked him. He was absolutely impassive, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and seeming to have no connection with the things around him. He didn't invite me to eat — I assumed that privilege and gingerly poked a finger into a biscuit. It felt like a biscuit. I bit it. It tasted like a biscuit. In fact, I am convinced to this day that it was a biscuit. But against the reality of that biscuit was the silent old man and his ghostly tread.

"Real, or unreal, the food was refreshing and good, and I fell to with a will. The old man sat down in a rocker by the fire and folded his hands in his lap. I ventured a remark about the storm. He didn't answer. I really had not expected that he would. The modest supper brought a tingle back to my blood. My nerves were calmed, the room cozy, the fire comfortable. I was beginning to enjoy this singular experience; but an occasional glance at the swaying rocker where the old man sat by the fire kept me alert. The rocker swayed dismally, but without the slightest sound.

"The warmth, the food, and my utter exhaustion conspired to make me a little drowsy, and once at least I must have closed my eyes. Then I opened them with a start. From somewhere above me, below me, or from outside where the storm still growled, came that awful, heart-tearing scream again, ending in a wail that brought me to my feet. The old man did not heed the quick movement by the slightest sign — he was still comfortably rocking.

" 'What is it?' I demanded.

"Revolver in hand, I rushed toward the door leading into the hallway. The old man was there ahead of me. He didn't touch me, and yet imperceptibly I was forced aside. He crossed the hall and went up the stairs. After a moment I heard a door open and shut.

"Except for the noise of the storm, the scream, and my own voice, it was the only sound I had heard since I had entered the house.

"I went up those stairs; why I cannot say, except that something, a

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vague, undefined curiosity, seemed to impel me. And with this impulse came again, stronger than ever, that sense of personal danger — the feeling that had possessed me ever since I had entered the house.

"I groped my way through the darkness to the top of the stairs; then my hand ran along a wall till I came to an open door. I stood there a moment, undecided whether to investigate further or to retrace my steps. I was on the point of going back down the stairs, but the flare of a candle almost in my face stopped me. The old man held the candle, shading it with his left hand, from which the forefinger was missing. The wavering light gave the withered old face a strangely drawn expression.

"He was within three feet of me, gazing straight into my face, and yet I felt that he didn't see me. For one moment he stood there, staring; then passing me, he entered the room beyond, where he put down the candle. I followed him into the room as a moth follows a flame. It was the light, I think, that lured me in. Here, once and for all, I would make an end of the thing. The old man, still noiselessly, went out the door by which he had entered, off into the darkness. The door swung to. Like a madman I sprang forward and shot the bolt. I don't know why.

"I felt caged. Whatever was to come, was to come here! It was an intuition that stirred more strongly in me than the sense of danger. I sat down on a clean little bed and stared thoughtfully at the single door — the only way out save by one of two small windows which I imagined overlooked the yard. I examined my revolver carefully. Every chamber was loaded, and the cylinder whirled easily. Well and good. I waited. What for? I don't know.

"The candle burned with a straight, unwavering flame, while I crouched there on the bed for a long time. The grumble of the thunder was growing faint and far away; but the rain swished against the windows in sheets. Here was a vigil, it seemed, and a long one; for sleep seemed hopelessly out of the question despite the insistent drowsiness of exhaustion. I wondered if the candle would last throughout the night. It was not yet half-burned. I gazed at it with a certain returning sense of assurance, and as I gazed, it flickered, flared up suddenly, and went out.

"I don't know what happened then. It might have been ten minutes later, or it might have been half a dozen hours, when strangling, choking fumes of smoke aroused me. My lungs were bursting for air. I struggled up on the bed, and was instantly conscious of the crackling sound of burning wood — of fire. *The house was on fire!* I rushed toward the bolted door, to find the flames already eating through the thin panels, and huge red tongues shooting out at me. I was cut off from the stairs.

"From there to one of the little windows! The glow far out through the rain told me that the whole house

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was aflame. I glanced downward. Sinuous forks were below me, on each side of me, above me. There was nothing to do but jump. I had only a moment to decide. I drew in my breath and pulled myself upon the ledge.

"And then again I heard that scream. Far across the open field, where the glow from the blaze dimmed off into the shadows, I saw a misty white figure with outstretched arms fleeing toward the forest. A little behind the floating white figure, and nearer to me, well within the range of the firelight, the old man was following. Even at the distance I could see his chin drooped upon his chest and his hands clasped behind his back.

"The next instant I had jumped . . .

"I found myself in my automobile skimming along a smooth, hard road that led through a forest. It was not familiar, and I didn't know in what direction I was headed; nor did it matter, so long as I got away from those things behind me. My ankle was badly sprained, my clothing torn and burned in spots, and my head throbbing with pain.

"Then I found myself in what seemed to be a street in a small city. A faint, rosy line was just tinging the eastern sky. Houses to the right and left of me were closed forbiddingly; but just ahead was the solitary figure of a man, walking slowly, swinging a stick. I ran the automobile alongside him, shouting some senseless question, then fell forward in a faint.

"When I recovered consciousness it was to find myself lying on a cot in a strange room, perhaps a hospital. A physician was bandaging my ankle. A thousand questions leaped to my lips and some burst out.

" 'Don't talk!' commanded the physician.

" 'But where am I?' I insisted.

" 'Millen,' he responded tersely.

"It struck me as curious that I should be here — that I should have reached the point for which I was bound even after all that had happened to me. It seemed centuries since I had left Pelham somewhere behind. Perhaps it was all a dream. But those screams! That silent old man! After a while I dropped into a sleep of sheer exhaustion . . .

"On the following day I was calmer. The physician asked me some questions, and I answered them to the best of my ability. He did not smile at my fright, only shook his head and gave me something which made me sleep again. And so for a week I lay there, helpless. But one day I awoke to clear consciousness. Then the physician and I discussed the matter at length.

"He listened respectfully, and at the end shook his head.

" 'There is no intersecting road between the small store of which you speak and the outskirts of Millen,' he said positively.

" 'But, man, I was there! I protested. 'I turned into the other road and drove till I saw the house in the open field. I tell you —'

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"But he let me go no further. I knew why. He thought it was some mental vagary; for after a while he gave me a pill and went away. So I determined to solve the matter for myself. I would go back along that road by day, and find that silent old man, and, if not the house itself, the charred spot where it had stood. I would know that intersection; I would know even the path which led from the mysterious road off into the wood. When I found these I knew the maze would fade into some simple, plain explanation — perhaps even an absurd one.

"So I bided my time. In the course of another week I was able to leave my cot and hobble about with the aid of a crutch. It was then that I took the physician in my car and we went back along the highway toward Pelham. It was all unfamiliar ground to me; there was no road, and suddenly there ahead of me was the little store where I had bought gasoline that night. I would question the old man I had seen there; but there was no old man. The little store was unoccupied; it seemed to have been unoccupied for weeks.

"I turned back and traversed the road toward Millen again. I recognized nothing; I could find no trace whatever of a bypath from the highway, in any direction. And once more I went over the ground at night. Nothing! After that, the physician — a singularly patient man — accompanied me as I hobbled through the forest on each side of the road, seeking the house, or its ashes. But I never saw anything that even suggested a single incident of that awful night.

" 'I know the country, every inch of it,' the physician told me. 'There isn't any such place as you mention.'

"And — well, that's all. I know the doctor's opinion — that my story was some sort of delusion — a dream. And in time I came to believe the entire experience an hallucination. I was growing content with this interpretation, even knowing it to be wrong, because it brought mental rest, and I was beginning to be myself again.

"Then one day I had occasion to look through the pockets of the coat I had worn that night. In the course of the search I thrust my hand into an outside pocket, and drew out — *a little ivory god, sitting on his haunches, grinning . . .*"

When he had finished reading, The Thinking Machine dropped back into the chair, with squint eyes turned steadily upward, and long slender fingers pressed tip to tip. Hutchinson Hatch, the reporter, sat staring in silence at the drawn, inscrutable face of the scientist.

"And the writer of this?" asked The Thinking Machine at last.

"His name is William Fairbanks," the reporter explained. "He was removed to an asylum yesterday, hopelessly insane."

(*Now turn to page 117 for Jacques Futrelle's conclusion to "The Grinning God"*)

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HIS EYES BLOODSHOT AND RED

by MACKINLAY KANTOR

On my left stood Joe McKinney,
His eyes bloodshot and red —
He gazed at the crowd around him,
And these are the words he said . . .
— St. James Infirmary

THIS RECORD BEGINS WITH A vulgar, homely sound, made by Mr. Jimmy Carrado as he stepped into the gilt-and-green elevator in the Lincoln Beach Apartment Hotel, and yawned loudly. . . . It is followed shortly by the insignificant *plop* of a gun with a Maxim silencer on the muzzle. But a few things do happen, in between.

For instance, the query of the red-uniformed boy in the elevator: "You seem pretty tired, Mr. Carrado."

"I sure am," said Jimmy. "Ahrr-hum." He stretched his arms. "Left a notice that I wasn't to be disturbed by no phone calls or things. I got a lotta sleep to make up — been working hard. But listen, you. I can only sleep two hours. At four o'clock I got to get up and catch a train outa town. And I'll want some coffee and a sweet roll or something. You bring 'em up."

The boy stopped the elevator at the fourth floor. "Sure. I'll bring 'em."

"At four, I said," Jimmy insisted.

"Sure."

"Now, you be there." Jimmy grinned — his dark, smooth, yet flashy grin. "Not a second before, and not a minute later, you be there at the door with those rolls. And for Godsakes, don't let anybody bother me before then. I want two hours of sleep, and then I got some important business to attend to, and then I gotta leave town."

The boy said, "Kayo. I'll be there at four with the coffee and rolls, and not one minute earlier. Yessir, Mr. Carrado."

Jimmy gave him a folded bill; the gilt doors slid apart, and Carrado stepped into the hall.

One minute later he was in his room. He stopped only long enough to pick up his new gun with its patent silencer, place it in the special holster beneath his arm, and button his coat again. Another minute, and he was back in the hall, leaving the door of his room locked behind him.

Not much danger of meeting anyone at that hour. At 2 A.M. even the people who lived at the gaudy Lincoln Beach had settled down. Jimmy strode along the hall, quietly. He was careful, but not overcautious. Overcaution, he had learned, spoils things. If anyone had looked out, they could

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have seen him easily: that slim, short, muscular figure; the quiet gray suit; the expensive straw hat, slouch style, with its modest gray band; the smooth dark face and flashing black eyes . . . But nobody looked out.

With no noise whatever, Jimmy opened the heavy door of the fire escape. One of those wise-guy doors: you could open it from the inside, but not from the outside. However, after Mr. Carrado had affixed a small piece of metal to the edge of the lock, which took all of five seconds, the door could be opened from the outside as well. Jimmy had experimented patiently with that small piece of metal. He was going to do this job right.

Down in the alley, he glanced quickly north and south. No one in sight. He ran like a lithe gray shadow down the dark court which opened to the west, turned in at a private driveway, and came out between two dark buildings on the east side of Clark Street.

Here was where he had to depend on luck — just a little bit. Sometimes there were lots of cabs booming along Clark Street. And often enough, especially when you wanted one very much, there were none to be found. But it was a warm night; and rainy nights were when the taxis reaped a harvest. So he crossed to the west side of Clark Street, oozed into some shadows, and waited patiently.

After five minutes a southbound street car hurtled past, its trolley snapping with a wisp of blue fire. Not far behind it raced two glittering, colored eyes — the burnished plate and chromium of a cab.

"Taxi!" Jimmy Carrado was at the curb.

The silent brakes gripped the shining beast, and held it.

"North State and Division. Make her travel."

The driver growled, "Yeah." These guys who always wanted to go somewhere in such a hell of a big hurry —

Down Clark to Center, and curving southeast on the long slant past the park. East into the park, wheeling breezily around the curves, on past Lincoln's statue, south again on North State Parkway —

The meter ticked calmly away. Jimmy Carrado sat there in the back seat, with his soft, manicured hands gripping his knees.

"Which side?"

"This'll do."

Jimmy got out, paid the driver, and tipped him. But not too handsomely. He didn't want any taxi drivers to be remembering any especially big tips, not tonight.

The taxi slid away toward the south, and Jimmy stood there on the corner at Division Street, taking in the lay of things. Nobody around that intersection. In the block toward the south, two slightly inebriated youths were stumbling along. One of them kept singing loudly: *She ripped and she tore and* — Then they would both laugh raucously and stumble on. . . . In front of that all-night restaurant, over west on Division

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Street, the usual sleepy middle-of-the-night crowd was waiting for a Broadway car. A big sedan slithered south along State Street, and passed him. Far away, a street car rumbled.

"Okay," thought Jimmy Carrado. He glanced at his watch. It was good luck, picking up that cab. Almost *too* good luck. He was ten minutes early.

In the pit of darkness behind the drug store, he waited. Once a laggardly patrolman thudded past, and Jimmy vanished until the slapping feet had gone their way.

Shortly after two thirty, another taxicab drew up at the curb across the street. A man got out, paid the driver; the cab droned off into the north.

Jimmy stepped out upon the sidewalk, and cleared his throat.

The man on the opposite side stopped to light a cigarette. Then he crossed the street. Jimmy met him at the curb. . . .

"Well?" said the other man.

When the fat old midwife rumbled down a Taylor Street stairway on the evening of December 5, 1902, so many years ago, she left behind her a weary yet smiling Mrs. Dominick Carrado, and two umber-colored twin boys. And it was wassail for all in the Carrado apartment, for two finer twin boys had never been seen on that block. They named them Giacomo and Antonio.

St. James and St. Anthony? Well, the prophets went off and cried bitter tears when they heard about it. Equipped with the celestial gift of forebodement, they could see clearly that James and Anthony Carrado would grow up to harry the police, to rally under the Capone banner, and withdraw safely and astonishingly to rally under their own — to grin their way into Chicago criminal annals like two identical black devils.

They were the enigma of Bertillon experts. Only their fingerprints told which was which. Antonio, full-grown, was perhaps an eighth of an inch taller than Giacomo; Jim was possibly a trifle larger around the waist than Tony. And one was as cold-blooded, as brutal, as egocentric as the other.

But their associates had no difficulty in telling them apart. Since his puberty, Tony's voice had been hoarse and guttural; Jim's had been shrill and thin. And since he bought his first necktie at a pushcart in Little Italy, Tony had been a gaudy Beau Brummel. The newspapers said that he owned 66 suits of clothes, which was probably a gross exaggeration. When tried for the murder of Jerry ("Pop-Off") Martin, he astonished the court with his vivid neckties of mingled emerald and orange. Jimmy, on the other hand, dressed with chaste sobriety — expensively, neatly, yet no more colorfully than a Franciscan monk.

And they both fell in love with the same woman. But only the woman knew that.

They were not the biggest shots in the underworld. But there were a

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lot of guys around town who were considerably smaller. . . . .

Jimmy said, "I got it. But I got to do a lot of explaining."

"Where'd you get all the dope?" asked Tony ("The Swell") Carrado.

James ("Little Jim") Carrado told him: "Oh, a guy slid out on him. Fellow you know — but I ain't mentioning any names yet."

Tony grunted.

"There's a lot in it," Jimmy went on. "I never saw a better layout for a joint like that. We can bring down good beer from Milwaukee, too — stuff those North Shore guys can pay for. It's only two miles from the state line."

"S'pose he doesn't wanta sell out?" suggested Tony.

His brother grinned softly. "Well," he said, "we can't talk about that here. I found out more than I expected to, anyway. Let's go over to your hotel and I'll show you some figures I got in my pocket."

"You said we oughtn't to be spotted together," Tony objected. "You said you wanted to meet me out in the clear. S'pose he got chopped tomorrow night? It wouldn't look so hot for us —"

"Listen," said Jimmy, "we got to get where there's light, and I don't want to sit in no restaurant. You slide over to your hotel, open the door of the fire escape, and stick a folded paper in it. Then I'll be right over." He took Tony's arm and pushed him along to the corner.

Within range of the nearest lamppost Jimmy stopped and stared at his brother.

Then he began to chuckle.

"What's so damn funny?"

"That hat."

Tony ("The Swell") Carrado took off his new $60 panama and examined it, scowling. It was of cunningly woven straw, dyed to a deep russet, and bearing a wide silk band of clashing white and green triangles. "What's wrong with this hat?" he snarled. He had always seemed slower of wit than Jimmy, even if at times more nicely calculating.

"Nothing. It's a red-hot number. But I ain't got a kick on your suit. Just about like mine. How'd you ever come to pick out a gray suit instead of a purple one?"

"Myrtle picked this out," said Tony loftily.

Jimmy's eyes narrowed quickly, then widened into his glittering smile. "Oh! How is Myrtle, anyway?"

"Fine as silk. She went to Rockford today. Her old lady's sick; but she'll probably be back tomorrow."

"Oh," said Jimmy again. He purred, "Listen, Tony. I want to get busy on this Wisconsin idea. It'd bring in the dough like nobody's business. Go on over to the Wolfshire and I'll ease up in the back. Leave your door unlocked."

He stood there on the corner and watched Tony crossing the street — a trim, muscular gray figure surmounted by the glaring vari-colored straw hat . . . "Gone to Rockford?" he

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grinned. "Oh, yeah?" But he whispered the words, to himself. Then he glided back into the shadows to give Tony at least five minutes' start.

It was the usual disordered room in an expensive hotel, where fly-by-night gentlemen had their day — or perhaps their hour — and were gone. Glasses stood whitening the varnish of a polished walnut desk. Cigarette butts were strewn upon the carpet. And the 66 suits of clothes, attributed by a worshipful press, were nowhere in evidence. That wasn't strange. Tony Carrado had lately set up an establishment in Rogers Park with one Myrtle ("Blondie") Haffner, and this wasn't Home, Sweet Home to him any more. At best, it was a room for hasty mid-afternoon conferences.

Jimmy opened the door quietly. His brother was on his knees in the farther corner, near the bathroom door, searching for a bottle of whiskey in an imported calf-skin traveling bag.

"What you looking for?" asked Jimmy.

"Want a drink. You drinking?"

"Yeah."

Little Jim cast a swift glance around the room. He had locked the door behind him. The shades were all drawn tight. No one had been out in the hall, and he had brought the folded chunk of newspaper, used to secure the fire-escape door, along with him. Now he opened it out, smoothed the rumpled sheets, and tossed the paper upon Tony's bed. Tony's suit coat and his glittering hat were lying there already.

Jimmy sighed amiably. Maybe he'd better wait until Tony poured out the drink. Leisurely, he began to remove his own coat. He folded it carefully and placed it on the bed, with his hat, beside Tony's things.

"Want it straight?"

"Just a snifter." Jimmy accepted the tiny aluminum cup, tossed the liquor down his throat, and, as Tony turned away for ginger ale, thrust the cup into his hip pocket.

Tony tilted the tall, glittering glass which he had removed from the ice-water tray. "What kinda rod you packing, there?" He pointed to the strangely extended shoulder holster under Jimmy's arm.

"New one. Show you in a minute." Jimmy loosened the gun in its socket.

Tony smacked his lips, swallowed, coughed, drained the glass. He set it down upon the table behind him and turned to face his brother again. "Well, let's get going —"

"How's Myrtle?" asked Jimmy — and shot Tony through the head.

Antonio sprawled back against the table; his knees caved in, and the body tumbled down like a spilled sack of potatoes.

For a moment, Jimmy stood there and looked at his dead brother.

"You won't go out with her any more," he whispered dryly. Then he drew out a clean handkerchief, wiped the revolver carefully and, still gripping it by the protecting cloth, slid it on the floor near Tony's outstretched

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hand. There were burns on the head. He had been careful, had held the rod close enough to make it look reasonable to the dicks. . . .

Again he stood still, and listened. No sound. The little spurt of that silencer hadn't bothered anybody.

Well, he had knocked off people long before this. He had come up from the petty, vicious banditry of the old 42 Gang; had held a Thompson against his shoulder; had seen people tossed into ditches. And he would just as soon have chopped Tony as anybody else. Damn right.

But it seemed strangely indecent to stand there in that room, under the bright lights, and stare at that elegant pile on the floor in front of him. Better get going. He made a hasty check in his mind: hadn't touched anything except that cup and the doorknob, since he came in. And, of course, the gun.

Click. It was better, with the lights turned off. Jimmy wasn't superstitious. He didn't care about that tumbled stiff over at the other end of the room. And he had held the handkerchief over his finger when he turned off the lights. Feeling quickly on the bed, he got his coat and slid into it. His fingers closed on the brim of his hat. He jammed it debonairly on the back of his head.

Still padding his hand with the handkerchief, he unlocked the door, twisted the knob, and stepped out into the hall. Well, it was all done. And plenty neat.

He left the door unlocked behind him, walked down the hall to the fire escape, and departed the way he had come. . . . The thought of Antonio Carrado, trying to find his puzzled way around Purgatory, did not bother him in the least. Little Jim congratulated himself again. He was not superstitious.

As he walked rapidly north toward the park, he reviewed the events of the night in his mind.

At only one point could he find a flaw. That flaw was the taxicab. Suppose the cops got curious and happened to run across that driver? . . . Forget it — one chance in a million! And one chance in another million that the driver would remember him, even if the cops did try to run down a cab. No, that flaw did not exist. But he wouldn't take chances on creating any more. He would walk all the way home.

The hands of his watch pointed to 3:10. Plenty of time to reach the Lincoln Beach before four o'clock.

Myrtle was waiting for him in St. Louis. He had told her, simply enough, that he would "fix things up with Tony." And probably Myrtle knew, by this time, what fixing things up would mean. But she was a game kid. She had said, "Jimmy, I'm sure on a hot seat. That guy is poison. Don't know why I ever got in on this."

And Jimmy Carrado's eyes had narrowed. "He don't suspect a thing, baby."

"Suspect what?"

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"That I'm nuts about you. He ain't got an idea."

And that conversation had started things. . . . Perhaps he was erring a trifle in beating it out of town so soon after he had chopped Tony. Maybe it would have been better to stick around and talk to the cops. But one of the Carrado boys was always out of town half the time, anyway. The cops wouldn't suspect anything. It was unknown to their associates whether or not Jimmy and Tony ever quarreled, even trivially. Apparently theirs was more than ordinary fraternity. But that fraternity did not exist after they set eyes on Myrtle Haffner. At least not in the mind of Little Jim.

We stick together, see? That was what Tony had always said, his rasping voice so coarse and defiant —

Unaccountably, Jimmy shuddered. Then he tried to forget that shudder by walking even more rapidly. . . . The street was dark and deserted; the sparsely-foliaged elms seemed like guarding sentries. North Avenue wasn't far ahead. The distant park was pock-marked with solitary lights and swaying shadows.

Carrado took the sidewalk which flung over toward the Lake. He had an errand over there. Five minutes later, standing alone above the faintly gushing waves, he was flinging the tiny aluminum cup out into the water. . . . There! Nobody would know that Antonio Carrado's brother had been drinking with him, in Room 526 at the Wolfshire Arms Hotel.

Now, to go on home. He waited behind a tree until some cars seething along Sheridan Road had left the winding asphalt as deserted as before; then he ran across the pavement and struck off, diagonally northwest, along the edge of the baseball diamonds. The park was summery and warm, even at that hour. . . . Jimmy imagined how it would be, after he and Myrtle got down to New Orleans.

Yes, maybe it was a mistake to leave town so soon. But his desire would not let him wait. Tonight, he and Myrtle would be in St. Louis together. To hell with you, Tony Carrado.

Fine as silk. That was what Tony had said.

Snarling faintly, Little Jim shook himself. Why couldn't a guy forget that stuff? He had forgotten plenty, in his time. Plenty!

Reaching down with nimble fingers as he strode along, he drew out his watch. He held it up to catch the glow of a park lamp, buried in the bushes with a swarm of insects buzzing about it.

The hands still pointed to 3:10.

He cried, half aloud, a common obscenity which he had learned long before he knew what it meant. . . . Then he was running, his soft soles thudding on the concrete of the winding pathway.

The damn watch had stopped! The Lord only knew what time it was! There wasn't a drug store or restaurant anywhere in that deserted early morning wilderness, where he could

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get a look at a clock. He didn't dare stop any car passing through. No, all that he could do was run.

Probably it was only about three thirty. Probably —

But if that elevator boy came up with the coffee and rolls at four — at four sharp — and he wasn't there . . .

He ran like a hunted lunatic. Behind him, the whole eastern half of the world was fading from darkness into gray.

We got to step on it. How often had he heard Tony say just those words? Growling them out —

Little Jim left the sidewalk. A man running on the sidewalk makes too much noise . . . He hurtled along under the ghostly trees, over the little hillocks, across the wide grass. Once he reached up to push the flapping hat more firmly upon his head.

Well, it wasn't far . . . and once he paused, leaning against a tree, to let his breath come back in great racking sobs. Then he fled on toward Lincoln Park West. . . . At last he broke from the trees, stumbled through flower beds, and made for the street. The door lights of the Lincoln Beach Apartment Hotel were glimmering through the foliage.

He waited to let a car whizz by. Then across the street, up the service alley, back around the corner. Far off, across the dirty black chasms, a clock began to chime. Blong . . . blong . . . Jimmy didn't wait to hear the third and fourth strokes of the bell. He scooted inside, reaching back to tear a slender wafer of aluminum from the lock. Then up the fireproof stairway, laboring, sobbing, until he saw that dark figure 4 swimming before his eyes. Once more he wrenched his homemade device from the heavy edge of metal. There. He heard it click behind him. . . .

Nobody in the hall. Had the boy been there? Had —

Far away, the muffled thud of a closing door. By God, the boy was coming! He had made it in time!

Little Jim opened his door, darted inside, slammed the door shut, and locked it. He dived across the room, flung open the outer window, and dropped into a chair beside it, gulping great mouthfuls of air even as his weak fingers stole up to straighten his necktie.

But by the time the boy had come down the hall and rapped at the entrance, he was able to call, "Yeah. Just a minute —" And after a few more gulps, he wiped his face with a handkerchief, felt to see whether his hat was on straight, and opened the door.

"Thought I'd better get up and dress," he grinned calmly at the surprised employee, even while his heart pounded like a butcher's cleaver, "so I'd be all ready to start. Much obliged, kid." He took the tray in his hand.

The boy was staring at him with lingering surprise and astonishment. "Say, Mr. Carrado —" he began.

Jim interrupted snappily. "Good kid. Right on time. Be downstairs soon as I grab a bite." He slammed

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the door, and heard the lad go scuffling away.

Well, he had his alibi now. Went to bed at two o'clock, worn-out; didn't get up till four o'clock. The boy could testify to both times, and the room clerk at the Wolfshire would swear that Tony came in and got his key a little before three o'clock. Simple enough, after he attended to just one more chore. . . .

He gulped the coffee; it was too hot; it burned his throat. Coughing and spitting, he poured the rest of it down the toilet. He crumbled up the rolls and put them in the same place. The Chicago river could never testify that Jimmy Carrado hadn't eaten his breakfast.

Then he picked up a bag, ready packed, which stood by the bed, pushed his hat back on his head, and strode down the hall, swinging the key idly in his hand.

This job is on ice, said the remembered voice of Tony Carrado. That was what Tony had said the night they took care of Punk McGuire. Again Little Jim felt his shoulders trembling . . .

James Carrado left the Lincoln Beach Hotel in another taxicab — left by the front entrance, smiling-faced and unafraid — and loudly announced that his destination was downtown.

But after they were well away from the Lincoln Beach Hotel, Little Jim rapped on the glass.

"Huh?" queried the driver.

"Stop a minute at that restaurant over on Clark and Center," directed Jimmy. "I forgot I had to make a phone call."

In a clammy telephone booth, which smelled of stale hamburgers and stale cigarette smoke, Jimmy called the Wolfshire Arms Hotel.

"This the desk clerk?" he asked, in a perfect imitation of the staccato voice belonging to Mr. George ("Scissors") Mazanti.

"Yes, sir."

"Say, has Tony Carrado come in yet?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Carrado came in at least an hour ago."

"Say, this is one of his friends talking. Tony left here an hour or so ago, and he was acting kind of funny. Not sick, but kind of funny. I got sorta worried about him. Wish you'd go up and knock on his door and see if he's all right."

"Why — uh — Yes, sir. I'll send somebody right up."

"Good. Knock real loud and see if he's all right."

Little Jim replaced the receiver . . . In the taxicab, once more jaunting toward the Loop, he permitted himself to visualize what was then occurring. The clerk, or one of his assistants, was knocking. No answer . . . He was knocking at Tony Carrado's door, knocking again and again. No answer. And then he was going in through the unlocked door, and finding what was there. And not long afterward the police surgeon would be declaring that Tony Carrado had died soon after he entered

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his room. *Just as simple as that*, said a vague voice in his ear, in a familiar way.

Little Jim tried to laugh. That was one of Tony's pet expressions, too. "You keep sticking around, don't you, Tony?" he murmured sarcastically.

We stick together, see? said Tony Carrado in the hammering brain of Little Jim . . .

At eight thirty Tony was still talking to him.

But Little Jim was not superstitious. He was a wise guy. He was careful. But he had never slain his twin brother before.

When he reached the Loop, he went into a sandwich joint and made a miserable pretense of eating. Then he threw some change on the counter, and strolled outside, still carrying his heavy bag. For three and one-half hours he walked the streets of the Loop. The bag was still solid in his hand.

His train didn't leave until nine o'clock. And he wanted to pick up some new shirts and socks and other things to wear in St. Louis. Myrtle was a swell babe — a guy would have to dress right to keep up with her. And of course he had always dressed right . . . maybe a little soberly. That was it — a little too soberly.

Fanshaw's wouldn't be open until eight thirty. He'd just have time to buy some things there, stuff it into his bag, and make the train. Previously, he had scorned the idea of Fanshaw's. It was an exclusive men's store in Wabash Avenue: five solid floors of high-priced masculine furnishings. Tony had always haunted Fanshaw's; Little Jim had bought his clothes from small tailor shops and the like. Fanshaw's was a place for guys who wanted to spread the kale around, and spread it noisily. But at a time like this, when a guy was going off on a swell trip — sort of honeymoon — Well, Myrtle was right. When it came to clothes, a guy had to put on the dog.

And so, for three hours and a half, Little Jim walked the streets. Once he paused, unobserved, to drop his home-made aluminum lock-protectors through a sidewalk grating. . . .

In the Loop they wouldn't be looking for him. If the police decided that Mr. James Carrado ought to be questioned in connection with his brother's suicide, they wouldn't search for Mr. James Carrado in the Loop. They would search at the Lincoln Arms, or over on the West Side, or out around Diversey. More probably they wouldn't search at all. According to testimony, he was already out of Chicago. . . . And, too, you don't meet men of Little Jim's sort in the Loop at six or seven in the morning. At that hour they are all asleep.

Got this job on ice, see? whispered the hoarse voice which trailed him.

Down La Salle to Jackson. West to Franklin. North to Randolph, over to Michigan, south to Jackson again. Around and around and around. And

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all the time Tony's voice was whispering in his ear.

He could see Tony offering that drink, gulping down his own. He could see Tony crossing Division Street in the dark. He could remember how Tony looked when he was up for murder; when he got out of Joliet on parole; when he told Boss Bill Polichek to take his hoods out of that end of town or he'd burn his guts out. . . . And, further back, he saw Tony serving as an altar boy, playing marbles in the street, swiping bananas off Old Herman's wagon, marking up his schoolbooks. . . .

Those were not nice things to remember. Nor was that voice which whispered in his ear a nice thing to hear.

Maybe its most ugly remark was shortly after seven o'clock, when Little Jim bought a paper down on Van Buren Street.

TONY CARRADO FOUND DEAD IN HOTEL, read the black streamer. And Jimmy Carrado heard Tony whisper hoarsely, *Anything I hate's a doublecrosser. I don't mind a guy playing me any other way. But doublecrossing. . . .*

Little Jim threw the paper into an alley entrance, and walked on. His face was a fudgy white; big drops stood out on his forehead; he brushed them away and pushed back his hat. . . . Myrtle in St. Louis. Going down there to pick her up, going down — Gone to Rockford to see her sick mother. Oh, yeah? . . .

It was 8:35 when that small, dark man in the gray suit — the man with the white face and the glossy shoes and the heavy traveling-bag — came up to Mr. Curtis's counter in Fanshaw's store.

"Well, well," beamed Mr. Curtis, gray-haired and talcum-powdered. "Mr. Carrado, I believe? What shall it be this morning? You are down very early, sir. But it is a fine morning —"

Little Jim clutched the polished mahogany counter with a thin steel hand which seemed to leave its mark in the gleaming wood. "I don't know you," he said, snarling. "What I want is some shirts."

"Shirts?" Mr. Curtis's benevolent smile had faded. An old customer, a polite cash customer, talking so — He drew himself up. "Very well, sir. However, I do remember you, sir. . . . Shirts? Shirts are on the second floor.

Little Jim stepped on the escalator. The little steps, the black ribbons of rubber, the polite hush, hush of constant machinery. Polite little stairways to carry you wherever you want to go.

Easy as that, see?

Jimmy cried, under his breath, "Shut up, you — you — Now I get it! He must have seen *you!* He never saw *me* before. I never was in this store —"

The steps moved up and up, the rubber slid smoothly under the flowing pressure of electricity. Little Jim Carrado, all alone, the bag in his hand, his eyes bloodshot and red,

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his forehead gleaming with wetness, being hoisted steadily toward Fanshaw's second floor . . .

And then he came up over the top. He stepped forward, off the sighing escalator — and stopped dead.

Tony Carrado was standing directly in front of him!

He was dead — you could tell by his face that he was dead — but it was Tony, unmistakably Tony. And he wore that hat, that screaming creation of russet straw and green silk triangles and —

Little Jim cried out, and reached for his gun. Even as quickly, Tony reached for his.

Jimmy threw his arm in front of his face, and turned to run away. He plunged down the stairway — the right-hand one, where the steps were moving down instead of up. Even as he fled, his senses were telling him: "You poor fool! That's not Tony. Tony's dead! You ain't superstitious . . . That's yourself in a mirror. Fanshaw's have got a big mirror at the top of that stairway. You didn't see Tony — you saw your own reflection! . . ." But still he couldn't help hurrying — hurrying away from that pale-faced, quaking man who waited to rise before him, his eyes bloodshot and red. . . .

From beyond the end of a somber, beveled counter where $10 neckties were on display, a big man let his blue eyes rest on the hurrying shape of Jimmy Carrado.

"Huh!" said the blue-eyed man. He loped after the runaway, his big feet slapping hard on the inlaid floor.

He caught Little Jim just before he reached the outer door. "Shopping early, Jimmy?"

Carrado turned like a cat. For a moment the ghost of his brazen independence flashed up . . . "Hello, Barney."

"It's a good idea to do your Christmas shopping early," said Barney, "or any other kind of shopping." And his huge hand was clutching Little Jim's arm like a smoker's fingers gripping a pipe-stem. "I had an errand downtown this morning, myself."

Jimmy snarled, "Listen, flatfoot! You ain't looking for me. Haven't got a thing on me today!"

"But you got a hat, Jimmy," said Sergeant Barney Owen, "and if it ain't the funniest damn thing! *I* got one, too!" His left hand exhibited a panama hat with a sober, pearl-gray band. "Did you know Tony was dead, Jimmy? Dead as a mackerel, he is. And this hat I found on his bed looks like it might be yours — J.C., it says inside the band. And you're wearing a pretty noisy hat yourself: red and green and white — my, my! I was just hunting around the stores to see who could identify this other one, and then you come barging down the stairs . . . Hold on, my boy! Hold nice and still. I want to look at that Fourth of July lid you're wearing, and see whether it might be Tony's. Did you knock him off just for the hat?"

Jimmy Carrado distinctly heard his brother Tony say, *We stick together. Together, see?*

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THE COSY NOOK MURDER

by ROY VICKERS

IN THE REPORTS OF A TRIAL FOR murder the defendant and the victim are generally seen as cardboard figures against the background of the crime. By tradition, the cardboard woman is colored brightly and the cardboard man darkly.

Thus, in the Cosy Nook murder, Hedda Felbert fitted neatly into the cliché of the woman scorned, and William Surbrook into that of the money-seeking male who over-reaches himself. Legally, it is irrelevant that Hedda did not know she had been scorned, and that Surbrook never moved a finger to possess himself of her money.

The money sequence was short and clear-cut. It began in Surbrook's office in Throgmorton Street on a morning in February 1929, two days after Henry Fauburg — the Fauburg who tried to corner quinine — had shot himself. Surbrook was a thoroughly respectable member of the Stock Exchange with a small but steady cliéntèle, of whom Fauburg had been the wealthiest. The suicide meant that Surbrook must conjure £20,000 out of the void within five days, or be hammered.

It ought not to have been possible for Surbrook to be involved. But no sane broker would be starchy about Stock Exchange rules with an apparently gilt-edged client like Fauburg — and that was the limit of Surbrook's adventurousness. As to his position, you could have added or substracted a nought, for all the chance he had of raising the money he needed.

Surbrook's reputation was spotless. A hammering was so rare and universally detested that he very nearly cherished the hope that the bank might waive the matter of securities and come to his rescue out of sheer public spirit. That, or a miracle, would save him.

We need not dwell upon his mental torture. It reached its highest point at the moment when he decided that he must go out to lunch, to keep up appearances, even if it choked him. It was then that the miracle appeared to happen — only he didn't believe it was a miracle. The message from the bank was no more than a form, stating that £20,000 had been credited to his account by a well-known firm of financial agents.

There was no violence in his relief — he was calm as a reprieved murderer. Some minutes had passed before he made a constructive attempt to cheer up — with very qualified success. He must behave decorously. During the lunch hour he sipped a coffee, then rang up the financial agents.

He was interrupted almost as soon as he had announced his name.

"Our commission was to make the

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payment. We have no further instructions."

He replaced the receiver without surprise, and made no further attempt. For five days he tried to humbug himself with one absurd explanation after another. Then, his reputation saved by the 20,000, he went in search of Hedda Felbert, whom he had not seen for some seven years — not since the day, to be precise, on which he had married Myra.

There was no difficulty in tracing her to Beringham, 30 miles out, in the Surrey hills. He checked with a local directory — *Felbert. H. Miss, Cosy Nook.*

Cosy Nook! His laugh held a touch of brutality. The moment she had a house of her own, she would inevitably call it Cosy Nook, even if it were a mansion. She had not changed. Some girls never change — only become, as it were, more so.

With some difficulty he found it on the outskirts of the town. It was not a mansion, but a small, brick-built bungalow. There was nothing about it to suggest the home of a woman who could throw away £20,000 on the basis of a single courtesy kiss, bestowed more than seven years ago.

His mother had started what he and Myra had called the Hedda Felbert saga. It was in the summer following his demobilization after the Kaiser's war. As part of the program of resettling him in civil life his mother had given a series of tennis parties.

"I want you to make sure that Miss Felbert enjoys herself, Willie. I met them during the war. Her father is a builder or something, and he was splendid at the Red Cross, but he's a bit stiff. Hedda acts as his secretary and I'm told she's very clever. But I don't think they go about much."

In 1919 Hedda was 30, three years older than himself. She was of medium height, with a figure which inclined to lumpiness, but would have yielded to treatment. She had a mass of brown, unruly hair and brown eyes that were a shade too prominent. Her mouth was firm and her nose well-formed. Though she could never have attained an insistent appeal, she could certainly have turned herself into a reasonably handsome woman, had she but perceived the need to assist nature.

Surbrook partnered her in a mixed doubles, when it became painfully clear that someone ought to have advised her to say that she did not play tennis. The game became a face-saving contest, in which their opponents cooperated. Surbrook felt more than a little annoyed with his mother. But the feeling passed at the end of the set, when he glanced at Hedda. She was very hot, and the unruly hair was in open rebellion, but her eyes were the eyes of a happy child. She had enjoyed every minute of it, had no suspicion that there had been any face-saving.

Later, when there was some danger of her being involved in another foursome, he detached her and gave

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her a lesson in clock-golf. She paid profound attention to his instructions, which she could understand but could not implement. Perseverance was among her qualities; but she failed to observe that she was keeping him from his guests for an unpardonably long time.

"I must try again," she would say, and then with dreadful archness: "I mean to make you thoroughly proud of your pupil!"

It was not possible to squirm — it was only possible to pity. She was not stupid, but imperceptive. It might even be true that she was clever at her work. But as a woman she was a lout, a predestined spinster.

His interest in her had been noticed and misunderstood. Thereafter, when people invited him, they tended to invite her also. Her existence became a mild nuisance to him, but he could not bring himself to the point of snubbing her. Her social life, he foresaw, would be a pageant of snubs.

He did not actively dislike her — he looked upon her as some sort of relation whom one had to treat kindly, because she was a little backward. He neither encouraged nor repelled her. He did not, in the phrase of today, make a date with her. True that he gave her a box of chocolates — by a regrettable coincidence, the decoration was a colored photograph of Miss Mary Pickford playing clock-golf — but this was only by way of apology for spilling coffee on her stockings.

His conduct was blameless, except in the matter of the courtesy kiss — which was a mistake, made in the utmost good faith.

They had been fellow guests at a birthday dance and there was no one but Surbrook to drive her home. Drawing up at her father's house, he was seized with a doubt — suppose she had found out that men generally kiss girls when they drive them home after a dance? Some girls have a pretty grim time — and some old maids have pretty grim memories, when you come to think of it.

He touched cold, bewildered lips, wondered whether he had made a fool of himself, went on wondering on the drive home, certain only that she had not been offended. Poor kid! She just couldn't get the hang of things. At least, she would now be able to brag to herself that a man had kissed her.

He did not guess that this kind of charity is a virtue of which Nature does not approve. Surbrook, in fact, had grossly underestimated the extent to which Hedda failed to "get the hang of things." In matters of organization and finance she was practical, efficient, and even talented. Except for a brief period at a kindergarten, she had been educated by her father, who had given her a view of human relationships which her budding womanhood was bound to reject. Accordingly, she had retreated into a world of her own of which she herself was the hub — a world of friendly women and gallant men.

Surbrook, of course, was wrong on the point of such a woman's memo-

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ries. Even at twenty-five, Hedda had begun to "remember" more than one handsome young man who had deliberately contrived his own death in battle for lack of her kisses. Another group, equally handsome but inclined to wistfulness, had refrained from declaring their passion lest they be suspected of fortune-hunting. Here was a touch of realism — for the practical Hedda had satisfied herself that her portion would eventually be about one hundred thousand pounds. And so the courtesy kiss, rather disappointing in itself, was shaped and fortified, until it became the keystone of her bridge to a reconstructed Valhalla.

There were no immediate repercussions. For some weeks Surbrook and Hedda chanced not to meet. Then he received an invitation to come to dinner and meet her father. As Mrs. Surbrook had frequently entertained Hedda, it was impossible to refuse.

Mr. Felbert turned out to be very much as Surbrook had expected — a social recluse forcing himself to be sociable. No one else had been invited. At dinner, the conversation took its tone from the furniture, which had been fashionable in the 1880's. After dinner, Hedda, at a nod from her father, "left the gentlemen to their port" — a good port but wasted on Surbrook, whose suspicions had been aroused.

Mr. Felbert offered a summary of Hedda's life, her mother's premature death, and his own attempt to take her place. This was welded into a brief account of the growth of his business. Mr. Felbert, in short, was on the brink of expressing himself delighted to welcome Surbrook as a son-in-law.

Surbrook was sufficiently adroit to escape without making a scene. Thinking about it the next day, he inaccurately concluded that it was Mr. Felbert who had forced the pace — even Hedda would surely have sense enough to tell him not to talk like that to the first man who had made a point of not avoiding her — for that, he assured himself was all his own part amounted to.

A few days later he met Myra, who drove from him the consciousness and almost the memory of Hedda. In a month their engagement was announced in the local paper. Among the letters of congratulation was one from Hedda. It was conventional throughout, except for the last paragraph: *I quite understand! Believe that, in all sincerity, I wish you every happiness.*

Surbrook assumed that it was no more than a clumsily phrased attempt to show friendliness. He next saw her on his wedding day — over the heads of a small crowd of idlers, when he was coming out of church. She was standing alone on the opposite pathway. She had accepted an invitation but had not turned up.

On his first wedding anniversary he received a letter from her, which gave him his first twinge of unease. It was an inoffensive meander, but its atmosphere was intimate, as if

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the writer were a close companion. After passing it to Myra, he decided not to answer.

There had been one such letter for each of his five anniversaries. Some eighteen months ago she had written a personal letter of condolence when Myra and his mother were killed in an air crash.

Before he could knock at the door of Cosy Nook, Hedda herself opened it. In seven years she had not even changed physically. There was the same unruly brown hair, the same suggestion of unnecessary lumpiness. Her face was unwrinkled, but, incredibly, she had taken to lipstick — possibly for the first time. The lipstick, too, tended to lumpiness.

She spoke as if they had parted, not seven years ago, but the previous day.

"You see — I was waiting for you! You did not have to knock."

Surbrook was disconcerted. "How did you know I was coming?" he asked.

She smiled. "I knew."

Of course she knew he was coming — to talk about that 20,000! But he had an uneasy feeling that this was not what she meant.

She had wafted him into the bungalow, chattering as she had always chattered.

"I built this very soon after Father's death. I always wanted a cosy little nook of my own — where I could *wait*, all by myself. I still go to the office, but you'll find I've become ever so domesticated. I manage with a half-daily woman. Say it's clever of me!"

While she prepared tea, he waited in the sitting room. Not a sitting room, he decided, but a drawing room, more formal than comfortable. The furniture was as modern and new as the house, but the room itself contrived to look old-fashioned. There was something indefinitely wrong with it: it exuded a spiritual left-handedness.

On a doubtfully serviceable escritoire was a large silver-framed photograph — of himself. She must have bought it from the photographer. Beside it was a very small one, cut out of a group, also of himself. He could not escape the truth that she believed herself to be in love with him. He would make every effort to avoid wounding her.

When she came in with the tray he noticed her dress, a pleasing green, well cut in a low *v*. There was nothing wrong about the dress, though there seemed to be.

There followed the ritual of tea, which he had always disliked and now endured with foreboding. She had not changed, but she had indeed become "more so." The gaucherie remained, and the fatuous little mannerisms. But her personality had been intensified, so that their former roles were reversed and it was she who was taking charge of him.

Hedda, in fact, had acquired strength through her unshakeable belief in her own ideals. When Sur-

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brook's engagement was announced she had kept her sanity by adapting her dream-life to the new facts. She identified herself with the great women, of so many legends, who wait for their wayward lovers, the waywardness being a test of faith. In a short time she became convinced that Surbrook would "return" to her. The air crash that removed Myra was therefore seen as the hand of fate.

Supporting the fantasy was a clear-cut emotional shrewdness. She valued her man above her fortune, which was meaningless without him.

He let her prattle on about her cakes and her garden and her house until he reached breaking point.

"Hedda, that 20,000! Why did you do it?"

"Willie, what a question!"

She got up, turned on the light, and drew the curtains. He waited until she stopped fidgeting.

"Look at the facts!" he exclaimed. "No sane business man would have lent me a thousand. I was due to be hammered. After that, I couldn't have got a job. I would have been knocking at doors, asking housewives to buy stockings, or something —"

"I know. I happened to see a man doing just that — and I got panic."

"But — *why?* I never gave you any reason —"

"I won't be bullied by a big, strong man like you." She pouted with inexorable archness. "And why do you go on asking that silly question? You haven't any proof at all that the money came from me." She paused and added: "And yet you *know!* Ask yourself how you know."

She was not making it easy for him to be kind, he told himself — as a mouse might have grumbled that there was no opportunity to be kind to the cat.

"We have to discuss what can be done about it," he said stubbornly. "It will take me a lifetime to repay —"

"Did you think I was looking for an investment?"

He got up, tried to pace the little room, but had to sit down again.

"Don't you see, Hedda, that the most dishonorable thing I could do — the most damnable insult I could offer you — would be to make love to you in return for the twenty thousand?"

He had taken the gloves off and struck, but she only laughed at him.

"Oh, my poor Willie! How you men deceive yourselves with words! We women are much more realistic. I wrote you — at the time — that I understood. I still understand. Just think it over, while I get rid of the tea things."

Surbrook did *not* understand — was, in fact, struggling to sustain himself in a state of non-understanding, an effort which failed when she returned.

"My father was purse-proud. He thought people esteemed him for his money. He thought the same must apply to his daughter. While he was talking to you after dinner that night, I — was crying! I knew that

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your self-respect would be affronted, that you would never seek me out again nor permit yourself to think of me. I *understood.*"

"But my dear girl, I fell in love with someone else."

"Of course you did." Her smile made him feel that her "understanding" would suffocate him. "I have learned a little about human nature — I know how such things happen. They cannot affect one's destiny."

That gave him the clue to the existence of a fantasy, revealed that she believed he had been in love with her and had married Myra in the hope of forgetting. No reasoning could shake that kind of belief.

If he were to marry her, it would not be for her money — she had made neither promise nor threat. It would be from pity. And, of course, gratitude. Lots of reasonably happy marriages must have been founded on much less.

"Hedda, you have saved me from the gutter. So far, I haven't uttered a single word of gratitude, because I —"

"Because you feel that you're under a terrible obligation," she interrupted. "Please, dear Willie, do let's be sensible about the money. Listen." She sat on a pouffe close to his chair, put her hand on his. "I never made Father's mistake. From the first — d'you remember when you taught me to play clock-golf? — I knew you were not drawn to me by the fact of my being an heiress. You did not even know I was, until Father told you. The other day, I had to send that money because, if you had been hammered, I would have suffered even more than you — wondering whether you would do what Fauburg did."

Again he felt that dangerous sense of superiority that permitted him to pity her.

"You have given me so much, Hedda, and I can give you so very little."

"Don't think about it like that. Give me only what you can't help giving me. I demand nothing, Willie."

She was telling him he was free — free to say thank-you for the 20,000, walk out of her house, and dodge her in future.

He looked down at her. At close view the lipstick wasn't really lumpy — it was desperately pathetic. And she had saved him from the gutter. It wasn't as though she were ugly, or physically defective. Surely, with a little imaginative effort on his part —

He lifted her from the pouffe.

While he was holding her, he faced the stark truth that this woman could never attract him, never elicit the faintest response from his nervous system. It was as if the lefthandedness, the muddled kindliness that had prompted him to kiss her — with histrionic emphasis — gave place to resentment.

"Hedda! That was a wrong-headed attempt to say thank-you for that money."

She laughed happily. In her fantasy

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the kiss always marked the end of cross-purposes.

"You *understand* . . . or you couldn't have made that joke!" Her voice was ecstatic. "We have waited so long, Willie, and now we have our reward. We can be married just as soon as you like."

Presently she was sitting beside him on a settee. She had said that she demanded nothing. That was romantic jargon, even if she thought it was true. She would soon discover it was not true. Before the period of the honeymoon was over, the forlorn little butterfly would turn into a spider. Now and again, her prattle penetrated to his consciousness.

"There are some lovely houses in Surrey, almost in the country. Not really far out. You could be at your office almost within an hour."

And when he got to the office he would know that he was operating by virtue of her money. As a subspecies of gigolo, lacking the gigolo's adaptability, but taking the gigolo's fee. And at five every day he would have to go home to the spider — even if the spider were only the symbol of his own self-contempt in the knowledge that he must perpetually fail her. The feeling of suffocation was coming back.

"I shall sell my interest in the business and give all my time to making our home as you like it."

No!

He had made no sound, but had the illusion that he had shouted. The superiority had been stripped from him — the arrogance that had betrayed him into pitying this woman — leaving his egotism naked. He was as a frightened animal about to fight for his life.

"And the rooms must be large, Willie. It will be lovely entertaining your friends."

Her chatter strengthened his will. His life would still be worth living, even with a secret he could share with neither man nor woman. He was cool-headed now — could see exactly how it must be done.

He would tell the police that he had proposed marriage.

"Darling," he said, "I had no idea this would happen to us — so suddenly. I've come unprepared." He drew from his hand the signet ring which had belonged to his grandfather. "Will you wear this until I can get you a proper engagement ring?" He took her left hand and placed the ring correctly. "I'm afraid it's too big for comfort."

"No, it isn't. I shall love to wear it."

Next, he must make sure that there was something in the bungalow that would tempt a thief.

"Hedda, have you any jewelry?"

"How funny you should ask!" She seemed irrationally pleased. "I have a little. I bought it myself. For a *reason!*" As he did not inquire the reason she added: "Would you like to see it?"

"Very much."

She left the room, returning with a decorated cardboard box: a faded

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ribbon paneled a colored photograph of Miss Mary Pickford playing clock golf.

"D'you remember sending me chocolates, Willie?"

"And d'you remember when I drove you home, after the Walbrook dance?"

Inside the chocolate box were three pieces. A star pendant, in diamonds, on a thin gold chain; a bracelet in rubies and diamonds; and a brooch in diamonds. The brooch was a ponderous affair — a monogram, *HW* — her initial and his — intertwined.

The audacity of that monogram acted as a spur.

"This is a secret, isn't it?" As she nodded: "No one knows that you have it?"

"No one but you."

Then no crook could have marked it down. But there were a lot of men on the prowl nowadays. If she were wearing it when one of them came to the door —

"Let me see it on you . . . I can fix the bracelet."

"Oh, no, Willie! Please no! It would spoil so much. I didn't really want to tell you, but you can guess. Can't you?" She lowered her eyes. "I look at it every night when I go to bed — just for a minute. I bought it for our wedding day."

When it came to telling the police that she had been wearing the jewelry, he must not trip over detail.

"The pendant — that hangs on this little chain just below your throat, doesn't it? If you were wearing the brooch — with that dress, for instance — where would it go?"

"Here." She placed her finger at the base of the *v* of her blouse.

She put the chocolate box on the pouffe and began to put the pieces back in the box. He moved near enough to the door to be able to reach the light switch when he wanted it.

"I'll have to be going now." He lowered his voice: "Come and say goodbye to me, Hedda."

She obeyed, without waiting to put the lid on the box. He studied her mouth. Even though it was a large mouth, it was yet small enough to be completely covered by the palm of his hand. When she came close, infatuated, he playfully took her wrists, drew them down until her hands rested on her hips. He had remembered the danger of her fingernails marking his face. With swift concerted movements he switched off the light, slipped behind her, and pinioned her arms. With the base of his left hand on her chin, he forced her mouth shut, her head pressing against his shoulder, his own back steadied against the wall.

His imagination had suggested that she was suffocating him, but it was he who, literally, suffocated her. . . .

She had been dead for many minutes before he was aware of muscular strain. He had shifted his position and could not reach the switch. In the dark, he lifted the body, carried it to the settee. On the way he nearly

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stumbled over the pouffe. He heard the jewelry fall to the floor. His right foot touched one of the three pieces. That did not matter. He lowered his burden and sprawled it on the settee.

He stretched, pinched and massaged his left arm. As he turned on the light, he spoke aloud.

"The financial agent will tell the police about that twenty thousand as soon as he's read his paper. The police will ask me for my alibi. Incidentally, my car has been parked outside all the time I've been here." He laughed, to whip up his courage. "All right — no alibi! In case the nerve falters, we'll remove temptation to pretend there is."

He opened the flap of the escritoire. On the blotting pad he wrote in pencil the telephone number of his flat and added: *If out, try club: Embankment 7210.* The technique of the crook would be worse than useless to him. Invert it. Give 'em fingerprints galore. He picked up and fingered the large photograph of himself, touched the top of the escritoire.

"Steady, now!" He glanced at the clock — eight minutes to seven. "Get the narrative right. I proposed to her, asked her to wear my signet ring. I left before seven, but I'll say I didn't notice the time. She was alone — wearing the jewelry — when she answered the door to a prowler who forced her in here, smothered her, and removed the jewelry.

"Footprints! The police can trace 'em even if there's no mud on your shoes."

He went to his car, put on the rubbers he carried for emergency, and re-entered the bungalow.

The jewlery was lying near the pouffe. The box itself was intact, the lid on the pouffe, the tray upside down on the floor. He left the box untouched. He picked up the pendant, the bracelet — lodged in the monogram of the brooch was his signet ring. Obviously, it had fallen off her finger.

He dislodged the ring and examined it. The hoop was uninjured, but the matrix had been scratched and a small piece had been cut clean out. Evidently, his foot had forced it against one of the diamonds. Better dump it, when he dumped the jewelry.

There would then be nothing to support his statement that he had proposed marriage.

"It's all right. Check up. She was wearing the jewelry. The ring could have been forced against the brooch while she was struggling with the prowler."

He went to the settee and replaced the ring on the finger.

"She was wearing the jewelry." It was becoming a chant. "A prowler wouldn't remove it as if he were a ladies' maid."

He picked up the pendant and wrenched at the thin, gold chain. By luck, it snapped at two points. A length of about a couple of inches fell to the floor.

"That bit might have dropped down under her dress."

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He dropped it under the dress, at the back of her neck. He noticed that the blouse was hardly disarranged. He disarranged it.

On the bracelet was a safety device — a short length of gold chain much thinner than that of the pendant. He wrenched it free and dropped it on the floor, near the settee.

That was all, for the bungalow. . . .

As he approached Beringham, his headlights picked out *The Barley Mow*, a tiny one-time inn that was now little more than a beer-house. He stopped, entered the empty bar, and beamed on the landlord as if they were old friends.

"Got any champagne?"

"Champagne! No, sir, I can't say as I 'ave."

"Then I'll have a brandy. And you have one too. I'm not mad, you know. A little light-headed, perhaps. Have a heart, landlord! One doesn't get engaged every day."

He bought a packet of cigarettes. With a question or two about how long it would take him to get to his club, he induced the landlord to note that the time was three minutes past seven.

He drove back to London via Thadham. On Thadham bridge, which is not bordered with a footpath, he kept close to the parapet. Assured that there was no one else on the bridge, he flung the jewelery into the Thames, knowing that it would sink in the mud some thirty feet below the surface. The rubbers, too, would sink, provided there was no air pocket; he slit them close to the soles and flung them down after the jewelery.

Then he drove on to his club, reflecting that, in order to hang him, the police would have to prove that Hedda had been murdered before seven. As the body would not be found until the half-daily woman arrived on the following morning, the police would be unable to do so.

Whether Surbrook actually got the better of Chief Inspector Karslake may be doubted. But it is indisputable that he avoided all the pitfalls and walked out of all the traps. The respectable stock-broker, the man of mild tastes and rather kindly disposition, had turned into a hard-headed egotist. He consistently inverted the crook's formula. From the first, he flourished all the facts unfavorable to himself and left the police to discover those that did favor him.

When the preliminary courtesies had been exhausted and Surbrook's fingerprints had been taken, Karslake began at what he believed to be the beginning.

"How long have you been engaged to the deceased?"

"No time at all! Until yesterday afternoon, I hadn't seen her for seven years." At Karslake's expression, he added: "I see I must give details. It's very awkward for me, Inspector. The fact is — five days ago, to be exact — Miss Felbert lent me twenty thousand pounds."

Karslake was startled and looked it. "And deceased lent you all that before you were even engaged?"

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"I'm putting it badly," apologized Surbrook, and weighed in with the tale of Fauburg's suicide and his own impending ruin. "The loan to me wasn't quite such an act of eccentric philanthropy as it sounds. I am a widower. I married, very suddenly, seven years ago. Before that happened, it was thought — that is, Miss Felbert and I — we thought it was she and I going to be married.

"I need not trouble you with any more about that. But please let me say this, Inspector, in fairness to Miss Felbert and myself. When I called at that bungalow I did not know that I would propose marriage. It happened of its own accord — as these things do." He stared vacuously at his own left hand and added, as if to himself: "I gave her my signet ring."

Surbrook was gaining ground. There were those photographs in the sitting room, and two more in the bedroom, bearing out his general statement. Karslake produced the signet ring.

"We took this from her finger. Do you recognize it?"

"Yes. It's mine, all right. But — what's happened to it?"

"Our expert's report says that cut was made by a diamond. We found the chip on the floor. The ring could have been crushed against one of the pieces of jewelery, while he was attacking her."

"Horrible!" said Surbrook, and wisely left it at that.

"Was the deceased wearing her jewelery while you were with her?"

"Yes. Rather a lot of it for the afternoon, but this was an occasion. The jewelery had belonged to her mother — it had been locked in her father's safe during his lifetime. She was glad of a chance to wear it."

"Describe it, please, Mr. Surbrook."

"I haven't much eye for that sort of thing, but I'll try. A bracelet — rubies and small diamonds. A thing on a chain at her throat — a pendant. And a brooch — about *here* — joining the folds of the blouse. It was in diamonds and it was large — but don't infer that Miss Felbert was an ostentatious woman —"

Karslake pressed for a detailed description of the brooch.

"Sorry, Inspector. But to me it was just a brooch."

Surbrook was treading carefully. To admit that it was a monogram of their initials would clash with his statement that the jewelery had been her mother's.

"Can you give me the names of a few friends who might be able to describe it?"

Surbrook obliged, knowing that no friend had ever been allowed to see it. He had cleared an awkward little obstacle and his nerve was the steadier when Karslake asked what time he had left the deceased.

"I didn't happen to notice the time. I can remember that nine had just struck when I went into the dining room at the club. So I suppose I must have left the bungalow about a couple of hours before that."

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"Can you produce any witnesses?"

"Not a soul!" sighed Surbrook. "Unless some men I nodded to at the club could help."

Surbrook had made a thoroughly good impression. The landlord of *The Barley Mow* had already talked to the local police, quoting the time as five past seven.

At the inquest Surbrook gave evidence as to his physical movements and as to the deceased having worn jewelery. The medical witness was unable to state that death must have taken place before seven in the evening. In short, the jury adopted Surbrook's theory of a prowling crook knocking at the door intending a preliminary investigation and seizing his chance to take the jewelery from the person of an unprotected woman.

In six months the case, with its items of real evidence, was passed to the Department of Dead Ends.

"You'll need more luck than usual for this, Rason," said Karslake. "There's nothing sticking out but the jewelery, and that'll be broken up by now." He paused and added: "If Surbrook scuppered her himself, he'll have dumped it. Not much to work on, there. Everything Surbrook said stands up."

Everything Surbrook had said stood up. Fear receded to vanishing point, taking with it the sharp consciousness of his crime. By Hedda's will he benefited by a further thirty thousand pounds. He moved into a larger flat in Bayswater. He did not cut himself off from the society of women. After one or two transient intimacies, he was considering a marriage of convenience to a wealthy widow — when he received a call from Detective Inspector Rason.

The streak of boyishness in Detective Inspector Rason — the ability to take a silly thing seriously — had never in itself brought him success, but it sometimes gave him a new approach to an old problem. It was a piece of boyish foolery with some jewelery, in no way connected with the Cosy Nook murder, which turned his attention to Surbrook.

He had spent an unprofitable morning in Hatton Garden, trying to identify some stolen jewelery, which included a star pendant in diamonds. Instead of going straight back to the Yard, he dropped into his sister-in-law's flat in Bloomsbury, and asked himself to lunch. He showed the jewelery to his niece, who admired it. She was having a fortnight's holiday at home and was going to an afternoon party.

"Pity I can't lend you this little lot. That star would look a treat in your hair. Try it, and see!"

"It isn't for the hair, Uncle, it's for the throat. And anyway, no woman would wear a diamond pendant in the afternoon."

"You don't know everything, miss! As a matter of fact, that rich girl, Miss Felbert, was wearing one very like this on the afternoon she was murdered."

"I don't believe it," said his niece,

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whom he encouraged to be cheeky. "You've got the evidence wrong again, Uncle."

He remembered her impudence some fortnight later, after a prolonged bout of desk work, which always depressed him. It was when he was in such moods that he would chase his wildest geese.

"Suppose the kid was right!" Rason urged himself. "Suppose the Felbert wasn't wearing a pendant, why did Surbrook say she was? Because he's a liar. Or because he mistook it for the brooch? No, he mentioned the brooch separately."

He opened the locker containing the real evidence of the Cosy Nook murder. He took out the green blouse. And two small pieces of gold chain, with cards attached:

Found next to skin, small of the back: believed fragment of chain securing pendant.

"Small of the back," repeated Rason. "Then she must have been wearing the pendant at the back of her neck. Hm! You've got the evidence wrong again, Uncle. Where's that blouse?"

He arranged the blouse on his desk, trying to visualize the position of the pendant. "Must have been about here — no, that'd be under her chin. Much lower down. That makes it right on top of the brooch."

He consulted the open dossier.

Brooch secured 'v' junction of blouse.

"Where's the *v* junction of the blouse? No buttons. Can't tell. Find the pinholes made by the brooch. . . . Must be in front somewhere."

But they were not in front — nor behind, for that matter. In a couple of minutes, though aided by a magnifying glass, he had failed to find the pinholes. With commendable caution, and remembering the lapse of time, he sent the blouse for microscopic examination. He received a report stating that there had never been any pinholes in the blouse.

"She may have been wearing a pendant, but she was *not* wearing a brooch!"

His discovery set him lurching and tottering along a trail which better detectives had already seen and rejected as futile.

"He said she was wearing a brooch, when she wasn't. Ten to one she wasn't wearing any jewelery at all." An odds-on chance, however, was rarely accepted by the legal department as evidence. He returned his attention to the dossier. "That signet ring was crushed against a diamond, so there was jewelery there, even if she wasn't wearing it. What was she doing with it? Just showing it to him? Then why couldn't he describe it properly — especially the brooch she was *not* wearing?"

There was something funny about that jewelery. None of the girl's friends had ever seen it, nor the servants employed by her father, though it was supposed to have come from her mother.

"Women who own jewelery and don't wear it, keep it in a safe-deposit vault. She never wore hers. But she

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kept it at that bungalow, which was often empty and unguarded. Wonder where she *did* get it? Come to that, she might have bought it herself. Girls do, sometimes, when a man doesn't give her any."

The dossier told him where Hedda had kept her private account. Rason astonished the bank manager by asking permission to inspect Miss Felbert's account for the last seven years.

"But the account closed with Miss Felbert's death. We don't have the records," he told Rason. Eventually, the manager was persuaded to send for an elderly clerk who had been in charge of the account.

"I would probably have noticed a payment to a jeweler, as such." The clerk held out no hope. "Poor Miss Felbert would draw the same amounts month by month, almost to a pound — year in, year out. The only largish check I can think of — why, it must be six or seven years ago, now! — was for three hundred and fifty pounds. It was to a Mr. Maenmawr — a Welsh name — I remember, because I happen to be Welsh myself. But I don't know that he was a jeweler."

He was a jeweler. He turned up the record.

"This is what you want, Mr. Rason. It was a special order. A pendant star and a bracelet from stock and a monogram of diamonds in brooch form — *HW*, intertwined. You can see from this illustration the sort of thing it was."

Hedda — William! Rason came within an ace of slapping the back of the very dignified jeweler.

"Can you make us one like it? We'll pay for the work, of course, but we'll only rent the diamonds."

On the way to Surbrook's flat Chief Inspector Karslake felt all his usual mistrust of Rason's slapdash.

"It's your case, Rason. I only hope, for your own sake, that you've worked out a proper line?"

"Won't need one, sir," chirped Rason. "I reckon he'll give one shriek, then throw in his hand. You might watch him, if you don't mind, for cyanide."

But on the Stock Exchange a man learns a great deal more than stockbroking — among other things, to keep his head in an emergency.

In the dining room of the flat, which the real estate agent had classified as "extremely commodious," the two detectives sat, with Surbrook at the head of the table. Karslake had coldly declined the offer of drinks.

"Ever seen this before, Mr. Surbrook?" On the table Rason put a large diamond brooch — in monogram form, *HW* intertwined.

Surbrook caught his breath. But Surbrook knew that a catch of the breath cannot be produced as evidence.

"The devil!" exclaimed Surbrook with elaborate embarrassment. "I've been dreading this moment. I'm extremely sorry, Mr. Karslake. I funked telling you about the monogram be-

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cause it would have revealed that Miss Felbert had it made — unknown to me — while I was married to another woman. It was undignified behavior on her part which I could not have explained away. And as it could not affect your investigation —"

"You can't know that!" snapped Karslake. "Misleading the police is a public mischief for which you can be heavily fined or imprisoned, or both." But his ill-temper was directed at Rason who was looking as if it were he who intended to throw in his hand.

"My superior officer," said Rason, rallying, "is a bit angry about your telling him that the poor lady was wearing her jewelery. In particular, you mentioned the brooch — you said it was pinned on at the *v* junction of the blouse. Look at the size of the pin on that brooch." From his bag he produced the green blouse. "There you are! You find the pinholes — unless you like to take my word for it that our microscope boys swear there never has been a pinhole of any size, anywhere, in that blouse. As to the pendant — d'you want me to go on, Mr. Surbrook?"

Surbrook wondered how much they were keeping up their sleeves. Bad as things were, there must be a fighting chance left, or they would have arrested him without all this talk.

"One lie was the father of the other, Mr. Rason. After I'd proposed to her, she fetched that chocolate box, showed me the jewelery, telling me she had bought it, to wear — to wear on our wedding day. She had always had a superstitious belief that my first marriage would come to an early end — it would break the charm, or something, if she were to wear it before then. So she put it back in that chocolate box in which she had kept it, also for sentimental reasons — I gave her the chocolates years ago." Surbrook added: "It's the sort of thing one shrinks from telling."

To Karslake's indignation, Rason was positively oozing sympathy.

"Well, I suppose we're all human, Mr. Surbrook. We accept your explanation — on the understanding that you will hold nothing back in future." Rason's graciousness was profound. As Surbrook relaxed, Rason went on: "It's agreed that the jewelery was not on her person when she was murdered. As we have your full cooperation now, Mr. Surbrook, perhaps you can give us a slant on this?"

He produced the signet ring.

"This scratch and cut were made by the ring being pressed up against a diamond. Our microscope boys again — you can take their word as gospel. Since there weren't any diamonds on her person, the ring could not have been on her person when it pressed up against the diamond. The ring must have fallen off her finger during the period in which she was being murdered. See what I mean?"

There was a long pause before Rason added:

"*Who would put the ring back on the dead woman's finger? YOUR ring, Surbrook!*"

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CASANOVA'S ALIBI

by RAFAEL SABATINI

THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT — although it is not explicitly so stated in his Mémoirs — that it was the sight of the mast of the fruit boat before the window of his prison that first dropped the seed of inspiration into the fertile soil of his rascally mind.

But let us begin at the beginning of this account of one of the early exploits of that Giacomo di Casanova, who has been aptly described as the Prince of Adventurers, and whom some have accounted the very Prince of Scoundrels.

He was at the time in his twentieth year, but with the appearance of at least another five or six. Extremely tall, well-made and personable, he had already acquired that noble air which later — and coupled with his amazing impudence and still more amazing wits — was to stand him in such excellent stead in the exploitation of his fellow-men. He was perhaps at the most critical age of his life. The career of the priesthood, for which he had been intended by his mother, and for which, surely, there never was born a man less suitable, had rejected him. The seminary at Padua, in which he had been qualifying for holy orders, outraged by the wildness of his almost pagan nature, had very properly expelled him. He had taken the expulsion shamelessly, in that spirit of philosophy for which he is so remarkable, accounting all happenings as for the best. Blithely he had exchanged the seminarist's frock for a laced coat, bought at second-hand, and the steel-hilted sword of the ruffler. Thus arrayed, he had returned in the summer of the year 1743 to Venice, the city of his birth, intent upon following his destiny — *sequere deum*, as he, himself, expresses it. There he eked out at the gaming-tables the slender allowance which his mother sent him out of her earnings on the trestles of a *forain* theatre at Warsaw; and we perceive already the beginnings of that extraordinary success of his at faro and other kindred games; a success so constant that, in spite of his emphatic and repeated assurances, it is impossible to escape a suspicion that he had discovered how to govern fortune by astuteness. But that is by the way.

The trouble with which we are now concerned came to him through one Razetta, a Venetian of some substance and importance, of whom he has many evil things to say, some of which are very possibly true. In what Razetta first provoked his hostility we are not permitted to perceive. But we do

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know that such was his hatred of the man that although Razetta must undoubtedly have been considered an excellent match for Casanova's sister — and there is no suggestion that his intentions by her were not honest — our young adventurer was determined not to have him for a brother-in-law.

Casanova's sister dwelt, as did Casanova himself in the early days of that sojourn of his in Venice, at the house of the Abbé Grimani, the kindly old tutor appointed to the pair by their absent mother. At this house Razetta became a constant visitor, and as soon as our shrewd-eyed exseminarist had perceived the real object of these visits, he determined to put an end to them.

He began with his sister. He addressed her one evening in that pseudo-philosophic strain which he affected — if his Mémoirs are a faithful mirror of his utterances — a habit of speech acquired, we suppose, in the course of his preparations for a pulpit which, fortunately, he was never destined to disgrace. He reduced her, he says, to tears; which is not in the least surprising to those acquainted with his rhetoric. Then he flung out in pursuit of her lover, who had just taken leave of Grimani. He overtook him on the Rialto, as he was crossing the bridge, preceded by a servant who carried a lantern. Casanova took him by the shoulder, announced that he desired two words in private with him, and ordered the servant to place himself out of earshot.

Razetta, an uncomely gentleman of five-and-twenty or so, too corpulent for his age, not suspecting what was coming, and deeming it well to use civility towards the brother — and such a brother — of the lady to whose favour he aspired, made no demur.

Casanova proved as prodigal of words with him as he was sparing of tact.

"It distresses me, Messer Razetta, that a gentleman of my condition should be reduced to discussing with an animal of yours so delicate a matter as his own sister. It is an indignity forced upon me by your lack of discretion. You have been wanting in that fine feeling which might have saved us both from the humiliations inseparable from this interview. That, after all, I suppose, was only to be expected from a person of your vulgarity."

Razetta's face had become congested. "Sir!" he gasped. "You insult me."

"I felicitate you upon a susceptibility to insult which I should never have suspected in a man of your deplorable origin and neglected breeding. Since it is so, I am permitted to hope that we may yet understand each other without my being put to the trouble of proceeding to harsher measures."

"Not another word, sir," blazed Razetta. "You . . . you . . . I will not listen to another word."

As he spoke, he swung upon his heel, and was making off when Casanova took him by the shoulder again.

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I have said that Casanova was of more than common height; it remains to add that he was of more than common strength. Razetta's soft flesh was mangled in that iron grip.

Casanova swung him round, and smiled balefully into the empurpled face. "It is as I feared," he said. "Indeed, until you spoke of insult, it had not occurred to me that mere words could be of the least avail with you. Nor, indeed, was I prepared to use with you any argument whatever. My sole intent was to command you never again to show your nasty face at the Abbé Grimani's whilst my sister is a resident there, and to assure you that in the event of disobedience — a folly to which I implore you not to commit yourself — I shall be under the necessity of breaking every bone of your body, among which your neck will probably be included."

Razetta shook with fear and rage. "By the Madonna," he swore, "I go straight to the Signoria, to inform the Saggio of your threats, and to claim protection. You'll be laid by the heels for it, you rascal. There is law and order in Venice, and ——"

"Alas!" Casanova interrupted him. "You precipitate your fate."

He swung his cane, and brought it down about the shoulders of his victim. Razetta struggled as best he might, struck out in self-defence, and bellowed for help. Over the kidney stones of the bridge his servant came clattering to his assistance. Casanova, resuming his grip of Razetta's shoulder, pulled him down to the foot of the bridge, where the parapet ended, and incontinently flung him into the canal.

When the servant reached him, Casanova was straightening his cravat and smoothing his ruffles. With his cane he pointed superfluously to the water, where Razetta was floundering and gurgling, in danger of drowning.

"There's your master. If you have any sense of your duty to mankind you will leave him where he is. But you may want to fish him out for the sake of the wages he will owe you. A pity."

He turned on his heel and went home to supper, feeling that he had borne himself with infinite credit, but deploring that in the absence of gloves he had been under the necessity of soiling his hands by the contact of so vile a body.

The sequel was what you might expect. Razetta, rescued from drowning, smarting with pain and anger, and still dripping, went instantly to lay his plaint before the Chief Notary — the Saggio della Scrittura — who was responsible for order in the Republic.

Next morning Casanova awakened to find his bedchamber invaded by Messer Grande, as the functionary was styled who executed the orders of the Saggio. In Messer Grande's large black gondola he was carried off to the Palace of the Signoria, and was presently brought before the magistrate and confronted with Razetta.

With wrathful volubility, punctuated by sneezings, the injured man

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poured out his bitter tale, and his servant confirmed on oath the truth of every word of it.

The Saggio was stern. "What have you to say?" he asked Casanova.

The swarthy, masterful face was a study in scorn; the full, red lips curled contemptuously. He was not to suffer truth to be an insurmountable obstacle to his defence.

"I have to say, Excellency, that this tale is all a lie. These villains abuse your credulity and make a mock of your justice. Let me throw light upon their motives. This rascal, this gutterling, permits himself the effrontery of paying his addresses to my sister. I have intimated my natural distaste to him, and informed him that it must cease. This, excellency, is his retort: basely to employ you to remove me, so that his ineffable purposes may be served. His lackey there is bribed and suborned to confirm the lies with which he insults you."

This was merely the beginning of his oration. Volubility never failed him, and whatever the Church may have gained when he was cast out of the seminary, there can be little doubt that she lost a preacher likely to have become famous, another Bossuet. What he may have lacked in evidence he supplied by ferbid verbiage. It was of the kind that carries conviction. Unfortunately on this occasion there was against him the testimony of Razetta's back and shoulders, still contused from last night's drubbing. The Saggio inquired sardonically whether it was suggested that Messer Razetta had had himself belaboured especially so that he might add weight to his accusation.

Casanova was scornful. "Evidence that he has been belaboured is not evidence that I belaboured him," he said.

This was reasonable enough. What was not so reasonable was that he allowed the magistrate to perceive that his scorn was for His Excellency's wits. The Saggio, after all, was only human, and so Messer Casanova was taken back to the black gondola. This was headed towards the Lido, and brought up a half-hour later at the steps of the Fortress of Sant' Andrea, fronting the Adriatic, at the very spot where the bucentaur comes to a halt when the Doge goes on the Feast of the Annunciation to wed the sea. A year's sojourn in this prison was the sentence passed upon Casanova for his offence against the peace of Venice.

The place was garrisoned by Albanian soldiers, from that part of Epirus which belonged to the Most Serene Republic. The governor was a Major Pelodoro, whom the ingratiatory Casanova impressed so favourably that he was given the freedom of the fortress. The Major took a lenient view of his offence, and was persuaded by the singular charm of the prisoner's assurances that the sentence was, anyway, unjust. He gave him a fine room on the first floor, with two windows overlooking the water, and it was from these that Casanova first espied

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the mast of that fruit boat, and conceived the notion of enlisting the fruit-seller's assistance so as to escape.

That, of course, was no more than the first crude germinal thought. Another in Casanova's place might have lacked the wit to go beyond it. But he perceived at once that a mere evasion could profit him but little in the end. It would mean remaining a fugitive from justice, probably hunted, certainly unable ever to show his face again in Venice, save at the risk of being dealt with in a fashion far more rigorous than the present. A door was certainly open to him; and he were a fool not to avail himself of it; yet he were doubly a fool unless he could avail himself of it to better purpose than had at first occurred to him.

He gave it thought, and this so fruitfully that when, soon after dawn on the morrow, the gentle splash of an oar sounded below, he slipped from his bed and gained the window. The single mast of the fruit barge came level with it at that moment.

Casanova put his head between the sill and the iron bar of the window, and called softly to the boatmen.

"Holà, my friends! Have you any peaches?"

"Peaches, excellency? At once."

One of the two men steadied the boat against the wall of the fort whilst the other swarmed up the short, stout mast, with a basket on the crook of his arm. Casanova stretched out to reach it, emptied the peaches, and put a gold coin in the basket.

"That," he said, pointing to the glistening ducat, "is fruit of another sort; it grows on the Tree of Wisdom. If you choose you may fill your pannier with the like."

The boatman, stupefied by such munificence, invoked every saint in the calendar to come and protect this prince who gave gold for peaches worth a few pence.

"Show me but where the tree stands, excellency," he ended.

Casanova's answer was indirect. "What would you do for ten ducats?" In naming that sum he named practically all the money in his possession, yet a sum, as he knew, which to a man of the fruiterer's modest estate must appear a fortune.

"Anything short of murder."

Casanova smiled, and nodded. "Be here at ten to-night, then. Now go with God."

Casanova's first impulse was to send the peaches, with his compliments, to the governor's wife. But, considering that his possession of them might afterwards supply a trace, however slender, he decided instead to eat a couple, and drop the remainder, one by one, into the sea.

Later that day, whilst taking the air with the Major's aide-de-camp, he happened to leap down from a parapet of the bastion. As his foot touched the ground he cried out in pain, staggered, and fell in a heap, clapping his hand to his knee. Stefani, the aide, came in quick concern to his assistance.

"It is nothing," said Casanova, and

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made shift to rise unaided. Finding the task impossible, however, he availed himself of the kindly hand that was proffered. Thus he came to his feet, or, rather, to his left foot, for now that he was standing he found it quite impossible to put his right foot to the ground. It was clear, he declared, that he had sprained his knee. He clenched his teeth as he spoke in a pain that Stefani perceived must be intense.

Leaning upon his cane on one side, and heavily upon Stefani's arm on the other, he hobbled painfully indoors and straight to his room, where presently he was attended by the surgeon of the fort. The knee was examined, and although no swelling was yet perceptible, it was undoubtedly extremely sensitive, for the patient winced and cried out whenever the surgeon pressed upon the cap.

"Evidently a sprain of the ligaments," the surgeon concluded. "Not very serious, but naturally painful. A very delicate joint, the knee. You have had a narrow escape, my dear sir. As it is, a few days of absolute rest and a bandage according to a fashion of which I possess the secret, and you will be yourself again. But absolute rest, let me assure you, is essential."

"I don't need the assurance." Casanova's lips twisted in painful humour. "I couldn't move if I would."

With the joint tightly bound in a bandage soaked in camphorated spirits of wine, and with the ailing helpless limb stretched across a chair, Casanova moped through the remainder of that day. The Major and some of the officers of the garrison, taking pity upon him, spent a portion of the evening at cards with him, and whatever the condition of his leg, it was clear that his wits had suffered no damage, for despite the small points for which they played he contrived to win a few ducats from them.

When, towards eight o'clock, they left him, to go to supper, he begged that his servant might be sent to him and permitted to spend the night in his room, considering his crippled state.

This temporary valet was a soldier of the garrison, whose services the prisoner had been permitted to hire for a few coppers daily. The fellow's chief recommendation lay in the fact that he had been a hairdresser before enlisting, and Casanova, vain of his thick, lustrous mane, demanded always the utmost attention for it. At this particular moment the sometime hairdresser possessed another quality that commended him to his temporary master. He was a notorious drunkard. Casanova, more than ordinarily indulgent now, supplied him with the means to gratify his vice. He gave him money and made him procure three bottles of a full-bodied Falernian from the canteen. Further, he insisted that the fellow should drink them all himself; that is to say, if such mild persuasion as it was necessary to employ can be described as insistence.

By half-past nine the bottles were

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empty, and the soldier-valet was snoring resonantly. By ten o'clock the entire fort was wrapped in slumber, for strict discipline prevailed and early hours were kept. Within a few minutes thereafter came the splash of an oar under Casanova's window, and but for the darkness a mast might have been seen.

Suddenly and miraculously cured of his lameness, Casanova slipped from the bed upon which he had been lying fully clothed. Nothing could have been more agile than the gait with which he sped to the window. The opening was crossed by a single rod of iron. But Casanova, whilst tall and strong, was still of a stripling slenderness at this time of his life, and there was just room for him to squeeze through the gap below the bar. He tied a sheet to it, twisted this into a rope, and a moment later he was standing amid the decaying vegetable matter in the barge.

There he found one man only, the fruiterer with whom he had that morning made his bargain. He pressed five ducats into the rogue's hand.

"The other five when the thing is done," he promised. "Now push off."

"Whither, excellency?"

"Why, to Venice. Land me at the Schiavoni."

They had words on this. The boatman had conceived that the fugitive — as he naturally supposed Casanova — would desire him to make for the open sea beyond the Lido, and so head for the mainland. This going to Venice seemed to him fraught with danger, and he spoke of the risk of being sent to the galleys if he were caught assisting the evasion of a prisoner. Casanova reminded him that he was to receive ten ducats, that ten ducats was worth some risk, and that he could not have supposed that he was to receive so great a sum merely in order to take a gentleman for a pleasure jaunt in his foul-smelling barge. Still, if he had been under that delusion, it only remained for him to return the five ducats already received, and allow his passenger to climb back into his room in the fort. As he spoke, in his softest voice, Casanova picked up a stout oaken cudgel that lay opportunely under his hand in the bottom of the boat, as perhaps a gentle hint of what might happen if the boatman's choice did not happen to be what was desired.

That ended the argument, and a half-hour later Casanova was landed at the Schiavoni. Bidding the boatman await him there, he went off at speed, making for the Piazza, and thence by narrow streets to the Rialto.

It was Razetta's invariable habit, upon leaving the Abbé Grimani's, to repair for a while to an obscure café beyond the bridge, taking his way home thence at about eleven o'clock. Casanova was counting upon this. Should the man unfortunately happen to depart to-night from his habit, Casanova must have recourse to sending him a message that would bring him forth.

Leaning upon the parapet of the bridge, he waited patiently, smiling

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grimly down into the black oily waters in pleasurable anticipation of the business ahead.

He was not disappointed. A few minutes after eleven had struck a man emerged from one of the little side streets on the right, again accompanied by another who carried a lantern. This light, borne by a servant, revealed Razetta.

Casanova quitted his position, and moved down to meet him. The place at that hour was quite deserted, and they had it to themselves.

They came face to face at the foot of the bridge, Casanova walking in the middle of the road. There he halted in such a way as to bar the other's passage, whereupon the servant raised the lantern so that the light fell upon Casanova's face. Stupefaction in Razetta was swiftly succeeded by fear. He conceived himself confronted by an assailant. Casanova chose to play the assailed.

"Do you put yourself in my way?" he cried. He whirled the cudgel, which he had thoughtfully brought with him from the fruit-barge, and the lantern flew into a thousand atoms.

"Seize him!" cried Razetta to his lackey. The servant, however, displayed no alacrity. He was nursing a hand that tingled from the blow that had swept away the lantern. Razetta stormed on. "Body of Satan! You've broken prison, have you? This will mean the galleys for you, you rascal."

"I don't know whom you are supposing me," said Casanova. "But you appear to be in a mistake."

"Mistake? Do you think I don't know you, rascal? You are Casanova. Seize him, zany!"

"Seize me, do you say? Madonna! If we are to have violence I must defend myself as best I can."

On the occasion of their last unhappy meeting he had been armed with a slender cane capable of comparatively light punishment. To-night the stout oaken cudgel that he wielded went near to endangering Razetta's life. The unfortunate lover screamed under its smashing blows, whilst his servant roared lustily for help. Casanova was too wise to linger. As before, he heaved Razetta into the canal, flung the cudgel after him and, in a voice of thunder, ordered the servant to be silent.

"Instead of squalling there, go and fish him out, so that I may have the pleasure of throwing him in again upon some other evening."

Already steps were approaching at a run. Casanova vanished into the darkness of a by-street, and within ten minutes of flinging Razetta into the water he was back at the Schiavoni, and once more aboard the fruit-barge. There was a freshening breeze, so they hoisted sail, and made a good speed towards the Lido and the fort of Sant' Andrea beyond it.

Before midnight had struck Casanova was climbing through the window of his prison. Another couple of minutes and he had peeled off his clothes and put himself to bed. His servant still slept in his chair, as Casanova had left him. One of the

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boots that Casanova flung at him struck him on the brow, whereupon he awoke with a choking start.

"What is it, sir? What is it?" he babbled, still half bemused from sleep and wine.

"You drunken dog!" roared Casanova. "Were you sent here to sleep or to watch over me? I might die for aught you know or care. Go fetch me the surgeon. I am in agony. My knee's on fire. I have a fever. See, I am all a-sweat. I cannot sleep. Go. Make haste."

Before that fierce urgency the servant fled, to return in a few minutes with the surgeon, who, in nightcap and bedgown, came puffing and grumbling at this midnight disturbance. Even as he entered Casanova's room the hour was booming from St. Mark's through the stillness of the night.

Casanova lay moaning, with his eyes half-closed. Seeing him thus, the surgeon stifled his irritation. "What's this? What now? Are you in pain?"

"In pain? In Hell, I think, and have been this hour past. A half-hour it took me to awaken that drunken sot. A half-hour of sheer agony. I burn. My knee throbs. I cannot sleep. For God's sake do something to help me."

Mechanically the surgeon took his pulse, and to his alarm discovered that it had almost ceased to beat. He was not to guess that in expectation of this Casanova had tied a ligature round his upper arm under his shirt. He departed in order to mix a drug, and on the way roused the governor, to inform him that Casanova was desperately ill. Major Pelodoro cursed Casanova and the doctor with equal fervour for disturbing his rest, unsympathetically turned over and went to sleep again.

Casanova swallowed the drug when it was brought, and the surgeon sat with him until he announced that he felt easier, and thought that he might perhaps now sleep.

In the morning he was so much better that he was able, supported by his servant, to hobble to breakfast in the governor's dining-room — for the governor had made him free of his table. There he congratulated the surgeon in very graceful and flattering terms upon his skill and the efficacy of his drugs. His knee was much less painful, he announced. The surgeon recommended care and rest for a few days, when he was sure that all would be well.

But there was to be no rest for Casanova just yet. Breakfast was scarcely over when the barge of Messer Grande drew up at the Fort of Sant' Andrea. The functionary was received by Stefani, the aide-de-camp, to whom he announced his errand.

"I am sent by his Excellency the Saggio to seek an explanation from Major Pelodoro. His Excellency desires to know how it happens that he has not been informed of the evasion of your prisoner, Messer Giacomo di Casanova."

"Evasion?" echoed Stefani. "What evasion? There has been no evasion."

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"Conduct me to the governor," said Messer Grande, peremptory and self-sufficient.

"I think it will be best," said Stefani, and led the way.

Messer Grande, a big man in black, carrying a cane, was ushered into the Major's office. He repeated the matter of his errand.

"His Excellency desires you to explain how it happens that the evasion of your prisoner, Casanova, should have been communicated to him by others than yourself."

The Major, who was by nature peppery, stared at him with bulging, angry eyes, offended by the policeman's tone. "What the devil is the meaning of this impertinence? Don't put on that air with me, my man. It's as silly as your message."

"Sir!" cried the officer in a big voice.

"Bah! Stefani, be good enough to ask Messer Casanova to give himself the trouble of coming here."

Messer Grande's eyes grew round. His mouth kept them some sort of company. "Do I understand that Messer Casanova is still in the fort?"

"Where the devil else should he be? What's this cock-and-bull tale of an evasion?"

"Cock-and-bull! I only know . . . ah . . . His Excellency is assured . . . He has evidence that Messer Casanova was in Venice last night."

"Has he? Well, I have evidence that he wasn't. Here it comes."

Casanova hobbled in, one arm round his servant's neck, the other round Stefani's so that between them they seemed to carry him. He looked bland inquiry from the Major to Messer Grande, and waited for them to speak. As Messer Grande merely stared, and the Major merely sneered, it was he, himself, who at last broke the silence.

"May I hope, sir, that your presence here and Major Pelodoro's request for my presence means that the truth of the matter with which I am charged has at last been brought to light, and that you are come to set me at liberty? Since I am suffering, as you may see, the news would be very welcome. Though considering that yesterday morning I had the misfortune to twist my knee, and have since been unable to walk, I am less vexed by my imprisonment at the moment than I might be at another time."

"You spoke of evidence," said the Major, enjoying the high-and-mighty Messer Grande's confusion. "Is that evidence enough for you? Or do you still think I allow my prisoners to escape?"

"I . . . I am at a loss," the functionary confessed. "Here are the facts as I have them from his Excellency." His explanation followed. Razetta and his servant had been before the Saggio that very morning to lay a second plaint against Casanova, the details of which the officer now supplied.

Casanova's face was blank with astonishment.

"Can malice really go so far? This is quite incredible."

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"Incredible?" cried the govenor. "It's impossible. At what hour does this man say that the assault took place?"

"At a little before midnight."

"That is easily disproved. But we won't waste words. Messer Casanova had best go before his Excellency, and his servant and the surgeon, who were attending to him here at midnight, shall go with him."

"I thank you, sir," said Casanova. "I can only look upon this as a dispensation of Providence to establish the villainy of Razetta."

His arrival at the Palace of the Signory surprised the Saggio as much as his appearance in the fort had surprised Messer Grande.

Casanova bowed as gracefully as his crippled condition would permit, a twinge of pain crossing his features in the act. He begged the Saggio, of his charity, to permit him to sit, and when this was considerately granted, he was lowered gently into the chair by the surgeon and his servant, his maimed leg stretched stiffly in front of him. He then delivered one of his famous addresses.

Somewhere in his voluminous Mémoirs he protests that a gentleman should never have recourse to anything but the truth, save only when he has dealings with rogues, with whom the truth would be unavailing. It would seem to follow that he had a good many dealings with rogues in his time, and it looks in this case as if the Saggio were carelessly included in that category.

"I understand, Excellency," he began, "that it is alleged by the man Razetta, and his servant, that last night, near the Bridge of the Rialto, at about midnight, I fell upon him with a cudgel, belaboured him, and then flung him into the canal, all, in fact, precisely as before."

"That is so," said the bewildered Saggio.

"When I was last before Your Excellency, I had the honour to inform you that your credulity was being abused and your high office mocked by those two villains, who conspired to procure my ruin. It is not for me to blame Your Excellency for having been their dupe. They were two, and I was but one, and the law — of which Your Excellency is so exalted and enlightened an administrator — runs that the testimony of two persons shall outweigh that of one. Happily there is another justice, which sees into the very hearts of men, a justice more discerning and far-reaching than that human justice of which Your Excellency is so noble and shining a dispenser. This justice has ordained that these rascals should overreach themselves in order to betray their own falsehood. If Your Excellency's renowned perspicacity should ever plumb the full depth of this infamy, it will be discovered, I have no doubt, that the man Razetta, misled by some false rumour that I had broken prison, and actuated by his malice against me to spur you on to effect my recapture, has come to you with this fresh lie."

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"The falsehood of your having broken prison is, of course, plain," said the Saggio. "Yet Messer Razetta's condition this morning, and the testimony of several witnesses, besides his servant, proves beyond doubt that he was cruelly beaten and thrown into the canal."

"All exactly as before, when I had the honour to point out to Your Excellency that evidence that the man had been beaten was no evidence that I had beaten him. It now appears to be established by the facts that I am not the only person in Venice who knows the execrable Razetta for a villain, and that those others signify their perception of the fact with a violence of which I ask Your Excellency to believe that I am incapable. Not only, as Your Excellency perceives, have I not broken prison, I could not have done so had the opportunity been supplied, and had I wished to do so. As the surgeon here will tell you, I have been crippled these four-and-twenty hours, unable to walk without assistance. Both he and this servant of mine will swear that precisely at the hour at which I am accused of having committed this assault on the Rialto I was in bed at Sant' Andrea, in extreme pain, in an exhausted condition and quite incapable of walking unaided. At need Major Pelodoro will add his testimony that he was informed of my need of the doctor's assistance at that hour. I will leave it to them to add what may be necessary so as to enable Your Excellency's acute penetration to reach the truth of this affair."

The Saggio heard the other two in turn, questioned them closely, and if they were less prolix, they were so definite that no conclusion was possible other than that which Casanova had indicated.

"It is enough," said His Excellency at last. "Since it is established beyond doubt that Messer Razetta was mistaken in his assailant last night it is impossible to resist the conclusion that he would be no less mistaken on the former occasion."

"Mistaken?" said Casanova, with a wry smile. "Is it possible that Your Excellency does not yet perceive the malice of that wicked man?"

The Saggio took up a pen. "You will be restored at once to liberty, Messer Casanova," he announced. "No need in this instance to confront you with your accusers. The case is too clear. I will deal with them." He bent to write, but Casanova had not yet reached the end of his rascally purpose.

"I go in such dread of the rancour of this villain," he said, "that I implore Your Excellency to accord me the State's protection until I am restored to such vigour as will enable me to protect myself. I shall be eternally grateful for permission to return to Sant' Andrea until my knee is completely mended — a matter of a week or so, the surgeon informs me."

The Saggio considered. "Very well," he said, at last, "if you wish it."

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But still Casanova had not done. "I thank Your Excellency, and it only remains for me most respectfully to submit that some amend is due for what I have suffered, morally and physically: the indignity extremely painful to a man of my sensitive honour, the duress in which I have been kept, and, finally, my present crippled state arising directly out of my imprisonment."

"The State, sir . . ." the Saggio was beginning coldly, when Casanova interrupted him.

"Ah, sir, your indulgence! It is not from the State that I suggest that any amend should come. It is not the fault of the State that these misfortunes have happened to me, but solely of this infamous liar Razetta. And I submit — most respectfully and humbly — that from Razetta should come the adequate compensation I solicit."

The Saggio proved sympathetic. Persuaded that Casanova had been ill-used, he confessed that the claim was not unreasonable, and he invited Casanova to state the sum.

Casanova fetched a sigh. "It is not in ducats and sequins that a gentleman of my condition can appraise the hurts he has suffered in honour and in body. Not, then, to compensate me so much as to punish the abominable Razetta for falsely procuring my imprisonment do I suggest that he should be mulcted in my favour to the extent of — shall we say? — a hundred ducats."

The Saggio pursed his lips. The sum was heavy. "I should say," he opined, "that fifty ducats would be an abundant fine."

"Your Excellency is the best judge," said Casanova, with angelic submission. "Fifty ducats be it, then, so as to teach him the way of truth."

Thus ended the matter in spite of all that Razetta had presently to say, which was a deal, and some of it so offensive and profane that it only served to confirm the Saggio in the conviction that he was dispensing strict justice to a worthless rascal.

With the fifty ducats Casanova set up a faro bank, and prospered so well that before long Venice became too hot for him, and he was compelled to seek fresh pastures for the nourishment of talents which, whilst undoubtedly outstanding, must, by the moralist, be accounted deplorable.

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

"Told with author's usual skill, but build-up a little too elaborate, throwbacks and throwaheads too frequent." (SC)	". . . beautifully plotted, this story will delight Rinehart fans." (FC)	
"The plot may not scintillate like some other Christies but it's perfect — and the characters are wonderful." (LGO)	"Nobody, absolutely nobody, is handier with a plot than Mrs. Christie, and this is one of her best." (AdV)	
". . . engagingly handled; denouement a mite tricky. Amiable." (SC)	". . . ebullient story . . . neat detective puzzle backing it." (DBH)	
". . . straight-forward, knowledgeable and convincingly human." (LGO)	"Smartly concocted tale written with a fine perception of character reaction." (DD)	
"Trial scenes superb . . . vivid chase stuff . . . fine performance throughout. More!" (SC)	". . . outstanding . . . No mystery connoisseur will miss this one." (DBH)	
"Cast too colossal . . . background knowledgeable; action rather placid. He's done better." (SC)	"Although lacking the heart of the Parisian books . . . a Paul topnotcher." (DBH)	
". . . much hue, cry, and dialogue. For Carter Dickson fans." (SC)	". . . somewhat incredible . . . on the long side, but devotees of Sir Henry won't mind." (FC)	
". . . honest and necessary toughness, right to the grim ending." (LGO)	". . . adult fare . . . none writes the hard-boiled mystery better." (DBH)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in The New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in The Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review of Literature*

DD: *Drexel Drake in The Chicago Tribune*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in The Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in The San Francisco Chronicle*

JS: *James Sandoe in The New York Herald Tribune*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in The Boston Globe*

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EQMM readers of long standing will remember that in 1943 we published James Yaffe's first story, "Department of Impossible Crimes," written when Jimmy Yaffe was only fifteen years old, and that we continued to publish his stories, including that remarkable one called "The Problem of the Emperor's Mushrooms," until young Yaffe got down to "more serious" work. In February 1951, Little, Brown & Company brought out Jimmy's first book, POOR COUSIN EVELYN, *a collection of his "more serious" short stories, and the book received glowing reviews from most of the important critics. At the time of this writing, Jimmy is working on his first novel, which is partially based on his year's stay in Paris after he was graduated from Yale and had finished a hitch in the Navy.*

And now James Yaffe, a little older and a little wiser, has returned to his first love, the detective story — or, as he himself expresses it, "it's really a pleasure to be back in harness." Before we tell you the kind of detective story the new James Yaffe has created, we would like to give you Jimmy's feelings and opinions on detective stories in general. Jimmy admits that it took him quite some time to learn that writing can also be fun, that writing does not always have to be serious and grim, that the writer is not necessarily less serious or even less interesting when he "is playing around and enjoying himself." It is because good detective-story writers do "enjoy themselves," thinks Jimmy, that mysteries have become so popular with "a startlingly weighty and profound group of people, from college professors to atomic physicists."

Still, Jimmy maintains, even a game has to be "about" something, or it's not really fun. The detective story should revolve around a wonderful, fantastic, or funny character — the detective; and the crimes which the detective solves should also be wonderful, fantastic, or funny, merely serving to portray the detective's strange and delightful mind in action. And Jimmy illustrates his point of view by giving examples of "the supreme archtypes: Sherlock Holmes, the scientific mind carried to such extremes that it becomes almost romantic; Father Brown, innocence and simplicity coming out on top in a chaotic and heretical world." The common denominator, according to Jimmy, is that the detective "is called upon to solve crimes that are completely suitable to the detective's personality." Thus, the so-called "artificial" detective story is like any good story in any other form — it reveals character through plot.

Now, with this 'tec philosophy in mind, what type of detective character did Jimmy choose for his new series of stories? In your Editors' opinion,

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almost the direct opposite of what Jimmy claims to be right! True, Jimmy admits that his new detective is "more simple, less spectacular than the archtypes." But it goes far beyond that: actually, Jimmy's new detective is not in the slightest degree fantastic. She is much closer to a realistic conception, with tenderness rather than fantasy and common sense rather than humor the keynotes of her character. Jimmy's new detective is "no more than a Bronx housewife, a good Jewish mother, whose son is on the police force and discusses his cases with her. It is 'Mom's' wise, kindly, shrewd, slightly cynical attitude towards life which enables her to penetrate to the truth of the mysteries which confront her son."

So now you know what to expect — almost the very antithesis of what James Yaffe set out to do! But you will be grateful for the paradox of the author's intent and his accomplishment. Here is a down-to-earth glimpse of a down-to-earth character in, admittedly (Jimmy did not desert his principles altogether), a slightly "fantastic" plot. "Mom Knows Best" won a Third Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest, and there is already a second adventure of Mom a-cooking . . .

MOM KNOWS BEST

by JAMES YAFFE

MY MOTHER ALWAYS WANTED ME to be a professional man. It didn't matter to her what kind of profession. Any kind would do, as long as it was really "professional," and absolutely not "business."

"Your uncles are in business, your cousins are in business, your Papa was in business, and none of them ever made a cent of money," Mom always said. "Except your Uncle Max, and he don't count, because God forbid you should ever turn out to be such a physical and nervous wreck as your Uncle Max and your Aunt Selma."

And so, even when I was a small boy in the Bronx, Mom saw to it that I got some professional training. She gave me chemistry sets for my birthday; she made me take violin lessons; she even encouraged me to work my childish charms on a distant cousin of ours who was a lawyer. And finally Mom got her wish. Today I am a professional man. But I'm afraid this fact has never given Mom any satisfaction. You see, she didn't exactly expect me to become a policeman.

From the very beginning she raised objections. All sorts of objec-

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tions, every day a new objection — but most of them were smokescreens. Her antagonism to the life of a policeman really boils down to two points. One: the work is dangerous. "All those gangsters and dope fiends and bookies and hatchet murderers and other such *goniffs* you have to deal with," she says. "Isn't it possible that you could get hurt some day?"

Two: she thinks the job is beneath me. "Always it was my ambition that you should take up something that needs a little intelligence and brainpower," she says. "But this detective work, this figuring out who killed who, and playing cops and robbers like the kiddies in the park, this is no work for a grown-up man. For all the brains it takes, believe me, you might as well be in business with your uncles."

And there is simply no way of talking Mom out of this opinion, of convincing her of the dignity and difficulty of my profession. Even though I've done pretty well for myself, even though I'm in plainclothes now and chief assistant to Inspector Slattery, Mom still makes fun of me. And with justice. Because to tell the truth, this cops and robbers business *is* child's-play — for Mom. Figuring out who killed who *is* an easy job — for Mom. With her ordinary common-sense, and her natural talent for seeing into people's motives and never letting herself be fooled by anybody (this talent comes from her long experience with shifty-eyed butchers and delicatessen store clerks), Mom is usually able to solve over the dinner table crimes that keep the police running around in circles for weeks.

In fact, I might even go so far as to say that my chief value to the Homicide Squad lies not in the strenuous investigating, manhunting, and third-degreeing that I do all week, but in the revealing conversations I have with Mom every Friday night, when she invites my wife and me up to the Bronx for dinner.

Take last Friday night, for instance.

Shirley and I got to Mom's apartment at six. Mom gave us the usual glass of wine, and we sat down to the usual roast chicken dinner (which is really unusual, because who can equal Mom's roast chicken?). For a while, the conversation ran along the usual lines. Mom told us about the ailments and scandals of everybody in the neighborhood. Then she gave Shirley advice on how to shop for groceries. Shirley is a Wellesley graduate with a degree in psychology, so naturally Mom is convinced that she's incapable of understanding the practical affairs of life. Then she lectured me on wrapping up warm in this damp weather. Finally, after bringing in the noodle soup, she asked me: "So how is the work going, Davie?"

"Nothing very interesting, Mom," I said. "Just an ordinary everyday murder case. Three suspects. One of them must be guilty. It's just a question of working on them long enough, till the guilty one cracks."

"And so far he didn't crack yet, the guilty party?"

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"Not yet, Mom. But he will, all right. We'll sweat it out of him."

"And out of yourselves, while you're at it!" Mom gave a sigh. "This third degree, it's harder on the policemen than it is on the crooks. If you men only would stop a minute and use your heads, look at all the *tsouris* you'd save. Believe me, there isn't a single one of you that don't need a mother to look after you."

"It's not a question of using our heads, Mom. It's patience, pure patience. I'll tell you about the case, and you can judge for yourself. You see, this girl was killed in a hotel downtown. A sort of high-class low-class hotel, if you know what I mean. Very sporty, expensive crowd. Stage people, gamblers, radio and television people — a pretty flashy assortment. And blondes. The place is full of platinum blondes. With no visible means of support. Maybe they call themselves dancers — only they haven't stood on a chorus line for years; maybe they say they're models — only they never get any closer to a magazine cover than a million other readers.

"That's what this dead girl was. A genuine platinum blonde, who used the name Vilma Degrasse. Usual career — quit high school at sixteen to go on the chorus line. Quit the chorus line five years ago — to move into the hotel. Been living there ever since, in two rooms on the fifth floor. Her and a steady stream of admirers. All male —"

"And to make a long story short," Shirley cut in, "last night one of them killed her."

Shirley is always taking it on herself to make my long stories short. This doesn't bother me much — when I married Shirley, I knew I was getting a superior-type woman — but it never fails to get a rise out of Mom.

She rose now. "Well, well, isn't that interesting?" she said, turning to Shirley with a sweet polite smile. "So you're working on the case too, are you, Shirley dear?"

Shirley smiled right back at Mom, just as sweetly and politely. "Not at all, Mother. I'm just trying to help David cure himself of his terrible habit of talking on and on and never getting to the point. It's something he picked up in his childhood, though goodness knows from whom."

"Now here's our three suspects," I interrupted quickly, as I saw a gleam coming into Mom's eye. "At ten o'clock last night the girl was escorted into the lobby by a gentleman — middle-aged banker of this city, named Griswold. Very unhappy about having his name mentioned in the papers. They were seen coming in by the clerk at the desk and by the elevator girl. The clerk is a gray-haired, seedy old man named Bigelow. The grumpy type. When I questioned him this afternoon he complained every two minutes about how he'd been standing on his feet behind that desk for four hours, and how the management don't even allow him to have a radio to help pass the time, and how the Assistant Manager is always poking

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around to make sure the clerks don't hide any magazines or newspapers under the desk, and so on and so on. And all the time this Bigelow was blowing beer fumes into my face. Unpleasant character, but just the same I think he's telling the truth. No apparent reason to lie.

"The elevator girl is Sadie Delaney, a talkative dark-haired Irish girl. Not married yet, built on the large side, but very cheerful and hearty, always doing special favors for people in the hotel. A good witness, too — cooperative and bright.

"So anyway, Sadie took the Degrasse girl and old Griswold up to the fifth floor, said good night to them, and rode down again. She passed the time with Bigelow about ten minutes, then she got a buzz from the fifth floor. She went up and found old Griswold waiting for the elevator and looking very mad. She took him down and said good night again, but he didn't answer her. He went stamping out of the lobby —"

At this moment there was an interruption as Shirley finished her noodle soup. "Oh, Mother, that soup was delicious," she said. "It's such a pleasure to taste your cooking. You know, that's really what you do *best* in the world."

"Thank you, with kindness, darling," Mom said. "But that's how it was with all the girls in my day, so I can't take any special credit. Even if we was too poor to go to college, we always learned something useful. We didn't fill our heads with a lot of *meshuggene* ideas that are no good to anybody — like so many of the young girls nowadays."

I saw that Shirley was getting ready to answer this, so I took a deep breath and hurried on with my story:

"A minute later, enter Suspect Number Two. This is Tom Monahan, the hotel handyman. He was just going off duty, but he told Sadie that Miss Degrasse had called him earlier that day to fix a leak in her bathtub, and he was afraid she'd be mad if he didn't do it before she went to bed. So Sadie rode him up to the fifth floor and rode down again. No sooner did she get down than she heard another buzz from five. She went up again and found Tom. He said he had knocked on the girl's door, got no answer, so he figured she was asleep already. He'd fix the bathtub tomorrow. Down he went with Sadie, and straight home from there.

"Now Sadie and Bigelow chatted for about twenty minutes in the lobby. They talked about the big prizefight which was on that night, and how brutal it was, and what a beating the champ was taking. Their chat was interrupted by Suspect Number Three.

"This is young Artie Fellows, playboy about town, theatrical angel, and general no-good, who's been showing up to see the Degrasse girl a lot of nights this last month. He was in evening clothes. Just left a party at the home of his young fiancée that he's going to marry in June. Sadie rode him up to the fifth floor and left him

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there. Five minutes later, the buzzer started ringing loud and long. She rode up again and found Fellows looking green. He told her he'd just entered the girl's apartment with his key — the key she gave him — and found her lying dead on her bed. Well, the house dick was called, and a doctor and the police, and it was finally decided that somebody stunned her with a blow on the back of the head, administered by a bronze candlestick, her own property. And then, when she was stunned, this somebody smothered her to death with a pillow. We found the pillow on the floor next to the body. It was all rumpled up, and there were teeth marks and saliva stains to show what happened."

"Somehow," Shirley said, "I find it hard to feel much sympathy for a cheap unrefined girl like that. Usually such people get what they deserve."

"Not always," Mom said, in a musing voice, as if she were talking to herself. "There's plenty people running around in this world that maybe ought to get themselves smothered. Not enough to kill them maybe — just a little bit smothered, to teach them a lesson." Before Shirley could say a word to this, Mom turned to me very calmly and said, "So go on with the case, please."

"Well, the first thing we did, of course, was to question the three men. Here's what they tell us: Griswold was cagey at first, but finally he came out and admitted that he and the blonde had an argument after they got into her apartment. She told him she was through with him, she'd found another gentleman friend who was younger and richer — young Fellows most likely. Griswold says he was mad when he walked out, but claims he didn't kill her. Says he left her very much alive, turning on her television set to listen to the big prize-fight. She was a great sports fan, especially if there was lots of blood. Well, so much for Griswold.

"For a while the handyman Tom Monahan looked like our murderer. We discovered a funny thing. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the bathtub in the Degrasse girl's apartment. So finally Monahan came out with the truth. He and the blonde were carrying on a little flirtation — he's a big husky good-looking fellow, and she wasn't what you'd call particular. Monahan made up that bathtub dodge as an excuse to go up and see her. But he sticks to his story about knocking on the door and getting no answer. Incidentally, we asked him whether he heard the television going inside the room. He says he didn't notice.

"As for Artie Fellows — he still claims he came into the room and found her dead. What's more, he corroborates Griswold's story about the television. The television was on full blast when he came in, he says. In fact, this struck him as an especially gruesome touch, what with that blonde lying dead on the bed.

"So that's the set-up, Mom. It's got to be one of those three. It can't

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be anybody else who lives in the hotel, because we've checked up on everybody — it's a small hotel, not many tenants, and they've all got alibis. And it can't be anybody from the outside, because the clerk and the elevator girl didn't see anybody else come in or out. In other words, it's strictly a routine job. Griswold, Monahan, or Fellows, take your choice. Eeny-meeny-miney —!"

"You forgot Moe," Mom said.

This remark struck me as slightly senseless, but I gave Mom a sharp look anyway — because her senseless remarks have a way of turning out to contain more sense than you'd expect. "What do you mean by that?"

"Never mind what I mean by that," she said. "Time for the chicken."

I was forced to control my curiosity while Mom served the chicken. When she finally got settled again in her place, I reminded her where we had broken off in our conversation.

"So now you've got those three men in your police station, is that it?" she said. "And you're beating them with rubber hoses?"

"Mom, how many times have I told you, we don't use rubber hoses. Modern police methods —"

"All right, all right, so you're psycho-annihilating them. Whatever it is, I'm positive it don't make no sense. The way you're handling things with this Platonic blonde —"

"*Platinum* blonde, Mother dear," Shirley said.

"So I said it." Mother gave Shirley a sharp look, then turned back to me. "What's holding you up on this case, I'd like to know? Why are you wasting your time with third degrees? A bunch of *schlemiels!* Why don't you arrest the one that killed her?"

"Because we don't *know* the one that killed her! In a few hours —"

"A few hours, phooey! A few years is more like it, the way you're going. So stop using your fists and your lungs, and start using your brains. That's the big trouble with the world today, too many fists and lungs, not enough brains. Listen, I wouldn't be surprised if you never even bothered to ask yourself the four most important questions."

"What questions, Mom? We've asked a million of them."

"Eat your string beans, and I'll tell you. Conversation at the table is fine, but a young man has got to have his daily supply of green vegetables."

I blushed a little, as I always do when Mom treats me like a small boy in front of Shirley, but I obediently started in on my string beans. And Mom started in on her "four most important questions."

"The first question," she said. "This Tom Monahan, the handyman. Has he got a wife?"

"Mom, is that one of your mysterious questions? Why, that's the first thing we found out. No, he doesn't have a wife. So if you're looking for a jealousy angle, you'd better —"

"String beans!" Mom said, pointing her finger imperiously. "It's my turn now to do the thinking, please. If you don't mind, the second

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question. How come this Platonic blonde —"

"Platinum, Mother," Shirley said.

"Thank you, thank you," Mom said. "Such an advantage, isn't it, to have a daughter-in-law that speaks such good English and isn't afraid to let the whole world know about it. — So Davie, how come, I was asking, this *Platonic* blonde didn't have any lipstick on when she got killed?"

This question actually amazed me a little. "Mom, how did you know she didn't have any lipstick on? I didn't say anything about —"

"You said that the pillow she was smothered with had marks on it from teeth and saliva. But you didn't mention any lipstick marks. A lady gets a pillow pushed over her face, believe me, she's going to leave lipstick marks as a result from the experience. Unless she didn't have any lipstick on! So how come she didn't?"

"I don't know how, Mom. She was getting ready to go to bed, so I suppose she washed her lipstick off. Is it really important?"

"Only to smart people," Mom said, patting me on the hand with a sweet smile. "The third question. When this playboy found her body, this Artie Fellows, the television was going full blast, is that right? So tell me, please, what program was on the television then?"

"Mom, are you crazy? Who cares what program was on the television? It's a murder we're investigating, not the television schedule —"

"In other words, you don't know what was on the television then?"

"As a matter of fact, I do know. Fellows just happened to say so. A musical program, some concert orchestra playing classical music. He noticed it because the music was very soft and sad, and he says he'll always think of it as Vilma Degrasse's swan song. Very romantic, Mom, but will you tell me what the hell that's got to do —"

"Swearing I don't like," Mom said, quietly but firmly. "Such language you can use in your stationhouse with the other policemen, but in my home you'll talk like a gentleman."

"I'm sorry, Mom," I mumbled, avoiding Shirley's eye.

"Fourth and last question," Mom said. "This hotel where she got killed, it's not located in such a swanky neighborhood, is it?"

"Mom, what does it matter —?"

"Do you answer me, or don't you?"

"It's a mixed-up neighborhood. The block that this hotel is on is very swanky and modern-looking. But right around the corner is Third Avenue, with all those tenement houses and dirty little bars where the bums hang out. All right, Mrs. Sherlock, does that help you? Is that the significant piece in the jigsaw puzzle which makes everything else fit together?"

Mom smiled quietly, unperturbed by my sarcasm. "If you want to know — yes, it is."

My past experience with Mom was enough to make me start a little. But at the same time I just didn't see how

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she could possibly have solved the case on the little evidence I had given her. So I pretended to be unimpressed. "Well, let me in on it, why don't you? Which one of those men do you want me to book?"

"The answer to that," Mom said, with a smile of secret wisdom that infuriated me, "you'll find out in a minute."

"You mean, you really *know* — ?"

"Why shouldn't I know? I know how people act, don't I? Just because it's a murder case, that don't mean people are all of a sudden going to stop acting like people. A girl like that Platonic blonde —"

"Platinum," Shirley murmured under her breath — evidently just for the principle of the thing, because Mom ignored her elaborately.

". . . a girl who all her life is around men, such a girl is very fussy how she looks when a man drops in. So how come, when you found her dead, she didn't have any lipstick on? When Suspect Number One, this banker, this Mr. Grizzly —"

"Griswold! Just as I suspected!" I cried.

But Mom ignored me and went on, "When he brought her home, she had lipstick on. He took her up to her apartment, she told him she wouldn't go out with him any more, she laughed at him and sent him away — do you think she took her lipstick off before he left? Believe me, it's impossible. When a woman is making a fool out of a man, *that's* when she wants to look absolutely at her best! So when Suspect Number One went away, she was still alive — with her lipstick on."

"Well — it sounds reasonable. So it was Suspect Number Two who did it, then. Tom Monahan! I had a feeling —"

"That's a lovely feeling," Mom said. "Too bad it don't have any connection with the truth. This Tom Monahan knocked on the door and asked her if he could come in and see her. A handsome young fellow that she was flirting with — listen, even if she already took her lipstick off for the night, you can bet she never would've let him through the door without putting it right back on again. But she *didn't* put it right back on again. So that means she *didn't* let him through the door. For some reason she didn't hear his knock — maybe because the television was on too loud. Anyway, he couldn't have killed her."

"And that leaves Suspect Number Three," I said. "Artie Fellows. I had a hunch it was him all along. Your lipstick clue won't work for him. He had a key to the apartment. She might've been in bed already, with her lipstick off, when all of a sudden he came barging in with his key."

"Maybe so," Mom said. "But you could get a big headache trying to prove it. You remember, I asked you that question, what was on the television when Suspect Number Three found the body? Earlier in the evening, when Suspect Number One went away, the girl turned on the

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big prizefight. But it was an hour later before Suspect Number Three showed up. The fight must be over by then — especially a fight that was so uneven. Like the clerk and the elevator girl said, the champion was taking a terrible beating. So the fight was over, but the television was still on when Suspect Number Three found the body. Why?"

"That's a tough one, Mom. Maybe because she wanted to watch the program that came on after the fight."

"Maybe, maybe not. So what program was she watching? A concert orchestra, playing classical music! Now I ask you, Davie, from everything you know about this girl — a chorus girl that never even finished high school — does she sound like the type that's interested in classical music? Not to me she don't. So why did she still have the television on? Only one answer. Because she was killed while the prizefight was still going, and naturally she couldn't turn off the television after she was dead. So there you are — it couldn't be Suspect Number Three, since he got there too late."

"But, Mom, don't you realize what you're saying? It couldn't be any of the three suspects, because you just proved it — and it couldn't be anybody else from outside, because the clerk and the elevator girl were watching the lobby — and we know it couldn't be anybody else in the building, because everyone has an alibi. In other words, it couldn't be anybody!"

"Alibi!" Mom gave a contemptuous little shrug. "Listen, Davie, when you get to be as old as me, you'll find out that the world is full of Alibi Jakes." ("Ikes," Shirley muttered.) "Nothing is easier than tripping up an Alibi Jake. People doing favors for other people, for instance. Take your Aunt Selma's cook —"

"For Pete's sake, Mom, what possible connection could there be between Aunt Selma's cook and —"

"For six whole months, every night, your Aunt Selma's cook sneaked out of the apartment to meet the delivery man from the grocery store. All the time your Aunt Selma's chambermaid knew it — but did she tell your Aunt Selma? Not a word. Every time your Aunt Selma rang for the cook, the chambermaid answered the bell. The cook is busy baking a cake, she said, or the cook has a spitting headache, or the cook is arguing over the phone with the butcher — or some excuse. Davie, you don't know servants like I do. As long as they're not mad at each other, they got a way of sticking together. Especially when it's a question of fooling the boss."

A small glimmer of understanding was beginning to come to me. "Mom, what are you getting at exactly?"

"You don't know yet? What a *nebbish* son I've got!"

"Well, if I'm not mistaken, you could be talking about — Bigelow the clerk and Sadie the elevator girl."

"A genius! A regular Dr. Einstein! Naturally that's who I'm talking

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about. You told me yourself, how this elevator girl is so obliging and good-natured, and always doing special favors for people. Well, there was twenty minutes *after* Suspect Number Two went away and *before* Suspect Number Three went up in the elevator, and during those twenty minutes this clerk and this elevator girl were supposed to be chatting together about the prizefight on television, how brutal it was and what a beating the champion was getting. But what I'd like to know is —"

I couldn't keep myself from blurting it out. "How did Bigelow know the fight was so brutal if he was standing behind his desk all night — since there's no television or even radio in the lobby? That's what you're getting at, isn't it, Mom? You're saying that after Tom Monahan left and before Artie Fellows arrived, Bigelow came out from behind his desk, took the elevator up to the fifth floor, and killed the Degrasse girl — and while he was killing her, he saw the prizefight on the television in her room! And all this time, Sadie stayed downstairs and watched the desk for him, and covered up for him because she's so good-natured!"

I was extremely pleased with myself for catching on so quickly, and it surprised me when Mom gave an annoyed sigh. "Good-natured," she said. "How good-natured can a person be? Is anybody *so* good-natured that they'd give a man an alibi for a murder? They might be willing to give him an alibi if he slipped away from the desk for *another* reason — but not for a murder."

"But, Mom, you yourself suggested — *What* other reason?"

"You told me the reason yourself," Mom said. "You just don't pay attention, Davie, not even to your own words. You explained to me how you questioned the clerk this afternoon, and how he complained to you every two minutes that he'd been standing behind his desk for four hours, and how he blew beer fumes in your face. So if he'd been standing behind his desk for four hours, and the Assistant Manager was always poking around to see he wasn't hiding anything under it, so where did he get a drink of beer?"

This question stunned me. I couldn't say a word.

"This is why I asked you about the neighborhood," Mom said. "And you told me just what I thought already. Around the corner is Third Avenue. Along Third Avenue is lots of bars. So this is how the clerk got his beer — he sneaked around the corner a few times to one of those bars. Chances are he does it every day — and chances are it's what he did last night, when he and the elevator girl were supposed to be chatting. And she gave him an alibi because she didn't want him to lose his job."

"Very clever deduction, Mother," Shirley said. "But what use is it to David? You know, he can't arrest a man for taking a drink during working hours."

"Oh, thank you very much for the

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information," Mother said, giving Shirley her most condescending smile. "But who wants to arrest him? Davie, don't it even pop into your head yet? If the clerk was off in a bar somewhere drinking beer, who's to prove where the elevator girl was?"

"Sadie? Why, she was in the lobby chatting with —" I stopped short, as the truth dawned on me at last. "Of course, of course! That conversation she had with Bigelow about the prize-fight! It takes *two* people to make a conversation! The same question I asked for Bigelow also goes for Sadie. How did *she* know that the fight was so brutal and that the champion was taking such a licking? She must've seen it on television — on the blonde's television!"

"Finally you're talking like a slightly intelligent human being," Mom said, beaming with motherly pride, despite her sarcastic words. "While the clerk was away in his bar, this elevator girl went up to the fifth floor, knocked on the blonde's door, then went into the room and killed her. And incidentally, you can see now, why the blonde didn't bother to put her lipstick on when the elevator girl knocked. Because naturally she wouldn't care how she looked in front of an elevator girl."

"But what about the motive, Mom? What was Sadie's motive?"

"Motive? The easiest part. Why do you think I asked you if this handy-man, Tom Monahan, was married? A good-looking unmarried Irish boy — a good-natured unmarried Irish girl — and a blonde who's coming between them. Listen, I'd be surprised if such a situation *didn't* end up in murder!"

Well, I spent the next few minutes apologizing to Mom for my skepticism — while Shirley put on a distant, faraway look, as if she were completely indifferent to what was going on, and not the least bit annoyed or jealous at Mom's triumph.

But one little thing still gnawed at me, and finally I came out with it. "Mom, I'm still puzzled about Bigelow, the clerk. He and Sadie both spoke about how brutal the fight was, just as if they'd seen it on television. We know now how Sadie got to see the fight — on the television set in the blonde's room. But how did Bigelow get to see it, Mom? — unless he was up in the blonde's room, too?"

"Davie, Davie, my little baby," Mom said, with a rather fond smile. "You forgot already where this Bigelow was for twenty minutes. In a bar drinking beer. And these days — though naturally I don't patronize such places myself — I hear that you can't get a beer in any bar without getting, along with it —"

"Television!" I cried. Then I jumped to my feet. "Mom, you're a mastermind! I'll call up headquarters right now, and tell the Inspector!"

But Mom's voice, quiet and firm, made me sink back into my seat. "Such *chutzpah!*" she said. "Nobody's calling up anywhere, or telling anything to anybody, till he finishes his string beans!"

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THE MAGGOT

by ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

THE BODY LAY IN THE MIDDLE OF the room; close by it was a small automatic. Over the congealing pool of blood flies buzzed in a shaft of early sunshine. A bizarre note was given to the scene by movable white screens, a spotlight, a gray-clouded backcloth behind a rustic bench, and a few children's toys — all the paraphernalia of a cheap photographer's studio. By the side of the dead man a large portrait camera brooded evilly, like an amorphous god silently approving a human sacrifice.

The studio — a spacious ground-floor annex to a once-pleasant private residence now dilapidatedly offering "Good Rooms To Let" — was otherwise sparsely furnished, and the slim, alert young man, who had been prowling round in apparent aimlessness, soon came to rest by a large desk at one end of the gray backcloth. On it was an appointment book labeled *Heston Hedges: High-Class Photographer.*

The last appointment for the previous day had been with a Mr. Sugden at 5:15 P.M., and Detective-Inspector Painton noted down the name and address: the recently departed police-surgeon had estimated the time of death as somewhere between five and seven the evening before. An open drawer next caught Painton's eye; the drawer was full of odds and ends, except for one corner. To this corner Painton devoted considerable close scrutiny. Then he strolled over to the sprawled shape that had been Mr. Heston Hedges.

The side-turned face, with its little mustache over thin greedy lips, was not a pleasant one, though wearing now a certain pathetic dignity. Between the close-set eyes was the small hole that had set free the life within. After a while Painton picked up the automatic, wrapping it carefully in a handkerchief, and put it in his pocket.

Finally he went to the front of the big camera and looked at it, pinching his underlip. The dark hollow of the lens stared back at him almost insolently. It somehow gave the impression that it knew a great deal, but was determined not to tell.

"I bet you do know a lot," said the Inspector thoughtfully. "And perhaps," he added, noticing that to one side of the apparatus a little frame affair stuck out, "you *will* tell." For it was the slide which normally protected the photographic plate facing a sitter and which was now withdrawn, leaving the plate ready to be exposed. Or possibly, thought Painton, with a sudden intake of breath, it had just *been* exposed, death coming to the photographer before he had time to

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push the slide in again. In which case . . .

At this point Detective-Sergeant Peter Boyle entered. "Ready to see the landlady now, sir?"

"I'm just coming. . . . Here, Pete, you know something about cameras. Get that plate out and have it developed."

Boyle looked closely at the camera, then pushed the slide in and expertly extracted the plate-holder, a flat wooden affair.

"It's a double holder," he said. "Reversible. Holds a plate each side and . . ."

"Well, have 'em both done. With luck we may have something quite interesting. . . ."

The official police photographer bent over his developing tray, tilting it back and forth. The red light catching one side of his face gave him a Mephistophelian appearance, which was belied by a light-hearted whistling between the teeth.

"Not a sausage," he murmured to himself, as the plate continued to give no change of color whatsoever. "Unexposed." He put it to dry, and began to repeat the process with the plate from the other side of the holder.

Suddenly the whistling faltered and died. "Gaw!" he exclaimed, the monosyllable falling dead and echoless in the box-like room. "What the . . ."

A black, shroud-like smudge was slowly showing under the magic touch of the liquid, framing at its top end a dark, ghoul-like half-face with large white pits for eyes. And through and beside this little image were appearing, colors reversed by the negative, the white pupils and black eyeballs of a large pair of human eyes. Right at the bottom the curves of a mouth were visible. It was a face — very close to the camera.

"Gaw!" ejaculated the young man again, as at last the dripping plate was held to the red light. "When the inspector sees a print of *that*, he'll be off pin-ups forever!"

According to the late Mr. Heston Hedges's landlady, he had not been making a success of the photographic business during the two years that he had rented the studio. From Mrs. Simpson's intermittent observations on the gate, his clients had been getting fewer and fewer.

"And what I say is," she explained to Painton with unassailable logic, "if you make your living by taking people's pictures you've got to have people come to have their pictures took. Not that he was hard-up," she added thoughtfully. "In fact, in the last couple of months he seemed to have come into a bit of money — new clothes and taxis and so on, if you take my meaning. I passed the remark about it only last week to my Elsie — you've already seen her — the same what found him this morning, and a nasty shock it was too!"

Painton nodded politely and asked if the dead man had had any particular friends or regular visitors.

"Well, unless I happen to be at the

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front I don't notice people. Of course, there's the girl."

"What girl?"

"Miss Murray's her name. She must be a friend, because she's been coming about once a week, and no girl can really want her picture took that often."

"When did she last come?"

Mrs. Simpson sat up. "Why, she was here last evening. I saw her leave soon after six." Her eyes glittered excitedly, as she realized the possible implication. Already she had learned that the photographer's death had occurred the evening before. "But," she added, almost regretfully, "he was alive then, because I heard her call out something to him as she went."

"What was it?"

"Something about someone called Maggie saying it was all right. I couldn't hear properly."

The Inspector asked a few more questions and returned to the studio, where he and Boyle went carefully through the appointment book. At last, about three months previously, they found the entry, "Miss K. Murray," and a Bayswater address. The name occurred twice the following week, without the address; the week after they found a hastily penciled "K. M." Then no more.

"See!" pointed out Painton. "She originally came as a client; then obviously they became friends. And as she was apparently the last person to see him alive, an early interview with her is our ticket."

"One minute, sir!" interrupted Boyle, who was again looking at the previous day's page. He took out a magnifying glass and, ignoring his superior's facetious remarks about Sherlock Holmes, closely examined the entry relating to Mr. Sugden. "*Was* she the last?" he asked finally. "That 5:15 has been altered from 6:15."

Painton whistled. "You mean Sugden *might* have come at 6:15, done the job, and altered the . . . But, then, why didn't he rub out the whole entry? . . . Oh, well, you go and see him this afternoon, while I see the girl. And," he added, remembering possible fingerprints on the automatic, "I think we'd better get the dabs of some of these people concerned. . . ."

Painton's reaction when he returned to the Yard and saw a print of the one exposed plate was much as the official photographer had predicted. "*That's* no pin-up," he announced with a little shudder. And indeed the shudder was justified. The photograph was macabre, horrible, obscene. An evil, little, white-shrouded devil with a bat-like face, resembling nevertheless the top half of a small whiskered skull, almost leaped off the flat surface of the print. Leaped, moreover, it seemed to the Inspector, from the very brain of the face that was the real picture, the close-up face of a girl with unsmiling lips and wide-set staring eyes. Yet the face was hardly noticeable at first, so

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dominated was it by the malignant little monstrosity. It was as though the Thing, whatever it was, had interposed itself suddenly between sitter and camera — *and* the sitter was aware of its presence.

"What do we make of that, Pete?" he asked Boyle at last.

"What *is* it?" muttered the Sergeant uneasily, looking at the tortured, staring eyes of the girl.

"Whatever it is, *she* knows."

"And yet it's in front of her. It — it seems to have come *from* her. If you know what I mean," he added, suddenly afraid of being laughed at. But his superior only replied gravely: "*I* know." Then coming down to earth, he addressed the photographer: "What is it, Blackie? Double exposure?"

The young man looked dubious. "It's just possible, sir. But it's more like a double printing. From two negatives, you know, and then rephotographed. Unless, of course . . ."

"Unless what?" snapped Painton. "There's no 'unless.' "

"You're right," agreed the other hastily. "It's a clever fake-up, though. But what's the big idea?"

"That's our job to find out." Painton stared at the print again. "Wonder who the girl is?"

Inspector Painton soon knew the answer to his question: indeed, he had already guessed. Later that day he found himself in a little sitting room in Bayswater facing the wide-set eyes of the photograph. In the hall a motherly Irish housekeeper, on learning he was a police officer, had drawn him aside and volunteered that Miss Murray was "a little delicate," and Painton now realized just what she had intended to convey. Those staring eyes appeared to hold a strange other-world intensity, which to Painton seemed to indicate a not-too-well-balanced mentality.

Watching her closely, he quietly informed her of Mr. Heston Hedges's death.

"Dead!" echoed the girl in a dull, flat voice. "When — when did it happen?" She turned her gaze full on him and, remembering the photograph, he felt a little shiver.

"Last night. You knew him well?"

"I saw him a lot. He knew all about things. He could tell me just what . . ." She broke off. "What shall I do?" she half-whispered.

Painton took out his notebook. "Perhaps you'd answer a few questions. . . ."

Miss Murray, it seemed, lived alone. She had no job: an aunt had left her money — oh, quite a lot — it was all in the bank. She had no relatives and didn't make friends easily. But Mr. Hedges was different. Her eyes upon the Inspector and yet seeming to look through him, she repeated: "He knew things."

"I see, he knew things," he repeated a little vaguely. "Now! Were you aware, Miss Murray, that Mr. Hedges possessed a gun?"

"Oh, yes," she nodded. "I saw it in a drawer one day. He said he'd got

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used to going armed in the war, but he told me not to tell anyone he had it."

"Why?"

"Because he hadn't got permission."

"You mean a license?"

"That's it. He said he bought it at a secret market in the street."

Same old thing, thought Painton angrily. The amount of crime in the country, he felt, would be more than halved overnight if only all firearms in the illegal possession of otherwise perfectly law-abiding citizens could be safely gathered in. He recalled himself to the main subject.

"You visited Mr. Hedges last evening, I understand?"

"Yes, it was to be a special photograph."

If that horrible faked picture was anything to do with it, it certainly was special, thought the Inspector. "Why 'was to be'?" he asked.

"I never saw it. I didn't stay."

"When you left, he was normal?"

She passed her hand in front of her eyes. "I understood he was quite happy from what . . ." And once more she broke off.

"From what?"

"From what was said."

Painton was liking the interview less and less. He was feeling extremely sorry for this bewildered, almost childish, personality. On the other hand, he was not at all satisfied. He produced the dead man's cigarette case. "You recognize this?"

"Yes, it's his," she replied, giving it back.

Painton hoped she did not correctly interpret the solicitude with which, feeling rather a brute, he returned the case to his pocket — her fingerprints now on it.

"I mean, it *was* his," Miss Murray suddenly corrected herself and burst into tears. "Because now he's *dead!* Help me!"

At this Inspector Painton, somewhat embarrassed, decided to call in the housekeeper and take his leave. He was puzzled, a little angry, and yet filled with a strange compassion. It wasn't till talking things over that evening with his father that he remembered that her final appeal for help seemed to have been addressed, not to him, but to somebody — or something — else.

It was the young Inspector's habit to discuss his cases with his father — an ex-Superintendent and in his day a big figure at the Yard. Big in more ways than one, for a rude colleague had once described him as being built on the lines of a floating dock. The old man's brain, however, was as alert as ever, and he had been often of great assistance to his son, whom he invariably teased for subsequently taking all the credit.

With an armchair fitting tightly round him and a tankard within easy reach, he was now listening with affable tolerance.

"So you see, Dad," the young man was saying, "the Sugden line is right out. He's a perfectly respectable tradesman who had rung up the

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before to change his appointment, the alteration in the book being made by Hedges himself. Besides, Sugden actually met the Murray woman arriving as he left. And I've now heard from the fingerprint people that the dabs on the gun are all hers. It's a German make, and I wouldn't mind betting Hedges bought it not a hundred yards from Rainbow Corner. Apparently he kept it regularly in a corner of the desk drawer — there are several tiny oil stains there — and the desk is only a couple of paces from . . ."

"Yes, yes," rumbled the massive figure in the chair. "Looks as though she did it all right. Had the opportunity. Had the means. But what about motive?"

"My guess is he'd been blackmailing her. I've checked with his bank, and she'd been paying him a good deal of money. But what's puzzling me, Dad, is this. She played the innocent know-nothing with me this morning; she even pretended he was still alive as she left the studio; yet at the actual scene she's left every possible clue, except her name and address — no, even that was in the appointment book."

His father thoughtfully surrounded a lot of beer. "From what you've told me, Jack, the young woman isn't — well, quite normal. She may have done it in a sudden blackout and then forgot. Didn't really grasp he was dead till your interview."

"Maybe. I've met cases. Matter of fact, I was going to contact her doctor before I saw her again tomorrow. . . ." He paused awkwardly. "You know, I'm somehow terribly sorry for that girl. The thought of her going through the mill — arrest, trial, everything . . ."

"Perhaps she won't have to." He tapped his forehead. "Here, if you like I'll come along with you tomorrow — purely informally. Might be able to help. . . ." He broke off. "I wish you'd take this blasted thing away!" He picked up the faked photo from the table. "I can't make head or tail of it, and the sight of it puts me off my beer. . . ."

Doctor Orford was deeply distressed by the young Inspector's information. "Miss Murray's slightly abnormal, I admit," he said, "but quite harmless. Talks to herself or suddenly appears to drift away from the present, but nothing more. That this should happen is quite incredible. . . ." At Painton's suggestion he dropped everything to accompany father and son on their visit.

"You quite understand, sir," repeated the Inspector, as they arrived at the house, "that this is just an informal visit. We want you to listen — and draw your own conclusions."

The doctor nodded in worried fashion, and was greeted with enormous relief by the housekeeper. "Indade, sorr, I was thinking of sending for you; for since the police gentleman came yesterday she's not been her usual self at all. . . . But ye'll see for yourself. . . ."

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When they were shown in, the girl at first gave no sign of recognition, but continued to sit staring straight in front of her. Her eyes, Painton noticed, were, if anything, more protruding, wilder-looking. Then she turned and smiled at Doctor Orford, but made no further move. Painton was just wondering how to begin, when his father suddenly lumbered forward and took charge — took charge with a sentence that made his son's face drop.

He sat down by the girl, gathered her hand in his as though she had been a child, and said: "Now we're all friends here. We want you to tell us about your shooting Mr. Hedges."

"Miss Murray, I ought to warn . . ." began his scandalized son, hurriedly official; but he was ignored. To his utter surprise she turned to his father, as to the one sensible person present, and replied simply:

"Because of the Maggot, of course."

Inspector Painton looked helplessly at the doctor, but the latter was intently watching his patient from a corner.

"The Maggot in my brain, you know. Of course it only talks to me occasionally, but I've had it for years and it was my personal secret. Till Mr. Hedges discovered it."

"And was he nice about it?" The Superintendent was radiating fatherly understanding.

"Oh, *yes*!" The wild eyes suddenly lit up. "He got to know the Maggot very well, and could often tell me what it said when" — she brushed her hand across her forehead —"when I wasn't very clear myself. He told me I had *always* to do just what the Maggot said. And he explained all about the money."

Ah, thought Painton in the background, so it wasn't blackmail. The dead man had been playing on the poor mentally-unbalanced girl's weakness, deliberately fostering her delusions for his own financial profit.

"You see, the Maggot said I was to give him money because I was sorry for him not being successful. He said, too, I was never to tell anyone else things. It was our secret." She laughed. It sounded normal, but it sent a little shiver down the Inspector's spine. She suddenly faced round to him. "So, of course, I didn't tell you yesterday about shooting him," she remarked in a friendly manner.

"And you gave Mr. Hedges money because the Maggot said so?" The Superintendent's sympathetic voice drew her back.

"Yes. Then a week ago he came close up to me, and listened to the Maggot, and told me it wanted me to sign a paper to make things easier for me about the money. . . ."

"Power of Attorney, the rat!" muttered Painton to himself.

"But I was feeling different that day." Again the pathetic little flutter of the hand as if to brush away clinging veils from the mind. "And I didn't want to. I said why did *my* Maggot now speak so often to him, and say things it didn't tell me. It seemed to have forgotten me alto-

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gether. I even said I didn't believe the Maggot was always there when he said it was. He said that was wicked; he'd often *seen* it, which I of course couldn't. Right here!"

Again she looked round at Painton and tapped her forehead. For a moment, as her eyes looked into his, he seemed to see that horrible photograph with the malignant little Thing — the Maggot, of course. Suddenly he guessed what was coming; and, while by gentle questioning his father drew out the story, he visualized the whole evil plot — her disbelief, Hedges's smooth promise to photograph the Maggot to prove his words, the faked plate ready for a pretended exposure. . . . Oh, he had everything cleverly arranged for the final deception that would give him complete control of her money.

"I see," his father was agreeing sympathetically. "An actual picture of your Maggot?"

"Yes. He said he might even get two. I was to stay and watch them being developed, to prove he wasn't playing tricks." She laughed knowingly. "As though the Maggot would have let him! He took the first and . . ." She faltered to silence.

"And then?" encouraged the older man.

"I heard the camera click and something went click in me. I ran to the desk, took his gun and ran back. As he said: 'What's the matter?' I shot him."

There was a short silence. Then: "Just *why* did you so suddenly shoot him, Miss Murray?" asked the Superintendent.

Her calm reply made Painton gasp. It was complete and perfect ironical justice.

"The Maggot had spoken to me at last without his hearing. It told me to."

"And that's that!" Painton had just concluded telling the story to Sergeant Boyle some hours later at the Yard. "She's been taken to hospital, and will have to be certified. Poor girl! That devil deliberately got hold of a slightly abnormal person, and out of her harmless delusion he invented something which pushed her over the edge of sanity forever."

"Still," commented Boyle, "he also invented his own death."

"That's only as it should be. . . . Come in!" The official photographer entered. "Ah, Blackie! File away these two plates and the print. We don't need 'em any more. . . . By the way, I wonder just *how* he was going to palm off that faked photo?"

"Easy!" said Boyle. "He'd have it on the back of the double holder, pretend to take a photo on the front plate, take out the holder, and replace it the *same way*, instead of reversing it and . . ."

"But," interrupted the Inspector, puzzled, "the girl said he did take a photo — remember she heard the click. And that front plate was unexposed."

"If the camera clicked," said Blackie, "definitely a plate was ex-

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posed — as long as the slide was out. . . ."

"Which it was," put in Boyle. "I pushed it in."

"And anyway," the photographer continued, "double plate holders are numbered — 1 and 2. A photographer always takes No. 1 first. When I developed the plates, this" — he tapped the print lying on the desk — "was No. 1."

"Yes," corroborated Boyle slowly, "when I took the holder out, No. 1 was facing the camera. . . ."

The three men looked at one another. "She must have been mistaken," said Painton at last in a low voice. "Or he faked a click. He can't really have *taken* this. I mean, there can't really have been anything there." He looked at the print with a new and terrible loathing.

Then suddenly he tore it across and smashed the plate down on the floor.

"It doesn't matter how it was worked," he snarled. "The case is clear enough without our thinking things. . . . Don't stand there staring!" he snapped at Blackie. "Get something to sweep up this mess."

Left alone, Boyle and his superior looked at one another again.

"About that photo, sir," remarked Boyle after a pause. "That faked photo," he corrected hastily. "It's a funny thing, but though the girl was looking straight at the camera, the — the Thing wasn't." He ran his finger round his collar and avoided his superior's eye. "All that malevolent stare was to one side — to where a photographer would normally be standing; just as if . . ."

"Get out of here," half-shouted Painton. "I tell you, there couldn't have been anything really there!"

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THE HOUSE THAT WAS

by JACQUES FUTRELLE

(*Continued from page 52*)

THE THINKING MACHINE ROSE AND walked the length of the room three times. Finally he stopped before the newspaperman. "And is there really such a thing as the grinning god that he describes?" he demanded.

"Certainly," Hatch responded, and his tone indicated surprise.

"Not necessarily certain," said the scientist sharply. "Do you *know* there is such a grinning god?"

"Yes," replied the newspaperman emphatically. "It was taken away from Fairbanks when he was locked up. He fought like a fiend for it."

"Naturally," was the terse comment. "You have seen it, have you?"

"Yes, I saw it. It's about six inches tall, seems to be cut from a solid piece of ivory, and —"

"And has shiny eyes?"

"Yes. The eyes are made of amethyst, highly polished."

Again The Thinking Machine walked the length of the room three times. "You came to me, of course, to see if it was possible, by throwing light on this affair, to restore Fairbanks's mind?" he inquired.

"Well, that was the idea," Hatch agreed. "Fairbanks was evidently driven to his present condition by the haunting mystery of this thing, by brooding over it, and by the tangible existence of that ivory god, which established a definite connection with an experience which might otherwise have been only a nightmare. It occurred to me that if he could be made to see just what had happened and the underlying causes for its happening, he might be brought back to a normal condition." The reporter was silent for a moment, with eyes set on the preoccupied face of The Thinking Machine. "Of course," he added. "I am assuming that the things he wrote down in his manuscript *did* happen, and if they did, that you won't believe they were due to other than natural causes."

"I don't disbelieve in anything, Mr. Hatch," and The Thinking Machine regarded the newspaperman quietly. "I don't even disbelieve in what is broadly termed the supernatural — I merely don't know. It is necessary, in the solution of material problems, to work from a material basis, and then the things which are conjured up by fear may be dissipated. That is done by logic, Mr. Hatch. Disregard the supernatural, so called, in our material problems, and logic is as inevitable as the fact that two and two make four, not sometimes, but all the time."

"You don't deny the possibility of the so-called supernatural, then?"

"I don't deny anything until I

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know," was the response. "I don't know that there is a supernatural force; therefore," and he shrugged his slender, stooping shoulders, "I work only from a material basis. If this manuscript states facts, then Fairbanks saw an old man, *not* a spook; he saw a woman, *not* a wraith; he jumped to escape a real fire, *not* a ghost fire. When we disregard the supernatural, we must admit that everything was real, unless it was pure invention, and the sprained ankle and burned clothing are against that. If these were real people, we can find them — that's all there is to it."

The Thinking Machine rose from the chair. "Now the first thing to do is to see Fairbanks in person. I think, if he can comprehend at all, that I may be able to help him."

The Thinking Machine was cordially, even deferentially, received by Dr. Pollock, physician-in-charge of the Westbrook Sanatorium.

"I should like to spend ten minutes in the padded cell with Fairbanks," Professor Van Dusen announced.

Dr. Pollock regarded him curiously, but without surprise. "It's dangerous," he remarked doubtfully. "I have no objection, of course, but I should advise that a couple of keepers go in with you."

"I'll go alone," announced the diminutive man of science. "By the way, you have that little ivory god here, haven't you? Let me see it, please."

It was produced and subjected to a searching scrutiny, after which the scientist set it up on a table, dropped into a seat facing it, leaned forward on his elbows, and sat staring straight into the amethyst eyes for a long time. A silence fell upon the watchers as he sat there immovable, minute after minute. Hatch absently glanced at his watch and went over and looked out the window. The thing was getting on his nerves.

At last the scientist rose and thrust the grinning god into his pocket. "Now, please," he directed curtly, "I shall go into the cell with Fairbanks alone. I want the door closed behind me, and I want that door to remain closed for ten minutes. Under no circumstances must there be any interruption." He turned upon Dr. Pollock. "Don't have any fears for me. I'm not a fool."

Dr. Pollock led the way along the corridor, down some stairs, and paused before a door.

"Just ten minutes — no more, no less," directed the scientist.

The key was inserted in the lock, and the door swung on its hinges. Instantly the ears of the three men were assailed by a torrent of screams. The maniac rushed for the door, and Hatch for an instant gazed straight into a distorted, pallid face in which there was no trace of intelligence, or even of humanity. He turned away with a shudder. Dr. Pollock thrust his arm forward to stay the swaying figure, and glanced round at The Thinking Machine doubtfully.

"Look at me! Look at me!" com-

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manded the scientist sharply, and the squint blue eyes fearlessly met the glitter of madness in the eyes of Fairbanks. The Thinking Machine raised his right hand in front of his face, and instantly the incoherent ravings stopped, while some strange, sudden change came over the maniacal face. In the scientist's right hand was the grinning god. That was the magic which had stilled the ravings. Slowly, with his eyes fixed upon those of the maniac, the scientist edged his way into the cell, Fairbanks retreating almost imperceptibly. Never for an instant did the maniacal eyes leave the ivory image: yet he made no attempt to seize it, he seemed merely fascinated.

"Close the door," directed The Thinking Machine quietly, without so much as a glance back. "Ten minutes!"

Dr. Pollock closed the door and turned the key in the lock, after which he looked at the newspaperman with an expression of frank bewilderment on his face. Hatch said nothing, only glanced at his watch.

One minute, two minutes, three minutes . . . The second-hand of Hatch's watch moved at a snail's pace . . . Four minutes, five minutes, six minutes. Then through the heavy, padded wall came faintly the sound of hoarse cries, of screams, and finally the crash of something falling. Dr. Pollock's face paled a little and he began to turn the key in the lock.

"No!" and Hatch sprang forward to seize the physician's hand.

"But he's in danger," declared the doctor, "perhaps even killed!" Again he tugged at the door.

"No!" said Hatch again, and he shoved the physician aside. "He said ten minutes, and — and I know the man!"

Eight minutes . . . The screaming had stopped; there was dead silence. Nine minutes . . . Still they stood there, Hatch guarding the door, and his eyes unflinchingly fixed on the physician's face. Ten minutes — and Hatch opened the door.

Professor Augustus S. F. X. van Dusen was sitting calmly on a padded seat beside Fairbanks, with one slender hand resting on his pulse. Fairbanks himself sat with the ivory image held close to his eyes, babbling and mumbling at it incoherently. An overturned table lay in the middle of the cell. So great had been the power used to upset it that an iron bolt which held the table fast to the floor had been broken off. The scientist rose and came toward them; and Hatch drew a deep breath of relief.

"I would advise that this man be placed in another cell," said the little scientist quietly. "There is no further need to keep him in a padded cell. Put him somewhere where he can see outside and find something to attract his attention. Meanwhile, let him keep that ivory image, and there'll be no more raving."

"What — what did you do to him?" demanded the physician, in perplexity.

"Nothing — yet," was the enig-

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matic response. "I'd like him to stay here a couple of days longer, under constant watch as to his physical condition — never mind his mental condition now — and then with your permission I'll make a little experiment."

William Fairbanks sat beside The Thinking Machine in a huge touring car, with the slender hand of the scientist resting lightly on his wrist. In front of them was the chauffeur, and behind them sat Hutchinson Hatch and Dr. Pollock. They were scudding along a smooth road, guided by the ribbons of light which shot out ahead from their forward lamps. The night was perfectly black, with not a light visible save those carried by their own car.

Behind them lay the quiet little village of Pelham, and miles away in front was the town of Millen. From time to time, as the car rushed on, The Thinking Machine peered inquisitively through the darkness into the face of the man beside him; but he could barely make out its general shape — a pallid splotch in the darkness. The hand lay quietly beside his own, and a voice mumbled — that was all. The newspaperman and the physician had nothing to say; they too were peering vainly at Fairbanks.

At last, the outlines of a small building loomed dimly in front of them, just off the road. The Thinking Machine leaned forward and touched the chauffeur on the arm.

"We'll stop here for gasoline.".

"Gasoline — stop here for gasoline!" babbled the senseless voice beside him.

The Thinking Machine felt the hand he held move spasmodically as the huge car ran off the main roadway and maneuvered back and forth to clear the fairway of its bulk. Finally it stopped, within a few feet of the door of the building.

Hutchinson Hatch and Dr. Pollock rose and got out. Hatch went straight to the little building and rapped sharply on the door. The sound caused Fairbanks to turn vacant, wavering eyes in that direction. After a moment a nightcapped head appeared at the window above. The Thinking Machine shot the beam of a flashlight into Fairbank's face. The eyes, now fixed on the nightcapped head, were wide open, and a glint of childish curiosity lay in them. The babblings were silent for a moment — somewhere in a recess of the maddened brain a germ of intelligence was struggling.

Hatch began and concluded negotiations for five gallons of gasoline. A shrunken old man brought it out in a can, and scuttled back into the house with his safety lantern. Dr. Pollock and Hatch took their seats again, while The Thinking Machine got out and went round to the back, where he spoke to the chauffeur, who was busy at the tank. The chauffeur nodded as if he understood, and followed the scientist to his seat.

"Now for Millen," directed the scientist quietly.

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"Millen!" Fairbanks repeated.

The chauffeur twisted his wheel, backed a little, then whirled his car straight to the road again, and shot out through the darkness. For two or three minutes there was complete silence, save for the whir of the engine and the whish of the tires on the road. Then The Thinking Machine spoke over his shoulder to Hatch and Dr. Pollock.

"Did either of you notice anything peculiar?" he inquired.

"No," was the simultaneous response. "Why?"

"Mr. Hatch, you have that automobile map," the scientist continued. "Take this electric light and examine it once more, to satisfy us that there is no road between the little store and Millen."

"I know there isn't," Hatch told him.

"Do as I say!" directed the other. "We can't afford to make mistakes."

Obediently enough, Hatch and Dr. Pollock studied the map. There was the road, straight away from the star indicating the gas station, and on to Millen. There was not a bypath or deviation of any kind marked on it.

"Straight as a string," Hatch announced.

"Now look!" directed The Thinking Machine.

The huge car slowed up and came to a standstill. The glittering lamps of the car showed a fork in the road — two roads, where there were not supposed to be two roads! Hatch glared at them for a moment, then fumbled awkwardly with the automobile map.

"Why, hang it! There can't be two roads!" he declared.

"But there they are," replied The Thinking Machine.

He felt Fairbank's hand flutter, and then it was raised suddenly. Again he threw the light on the pallid face. A strange expression was there; a set, incredible expression which might have meant anything. The eyes were turned ahead to where the road was split by a small clump of trees.

"Keep on to your left," The Thinking Machine directed the chauffeur, without, however, removing his eyes from the face of the man beside him. "A little more slowly."

The car started up again and swung off to the left, sharply. Every eye, save the squint, blue ones of the scientist, was turned ahead; he was still staring into the face of his patient. Only the chauffeur realized what a steady turn to the left the car made; but he said nothing, only felt his way along till suddenly the road widened a little where a path cut through the dense forest. The car slowed up.

"Don't stop!" commanded the scientist sharply. "Go ahead!"

With a sudden spurt the car rushed forward, skimming along easily for a time, and then the heavy jolting told them that the road was growing rougher, and here, dimly ahead of them, they saw an open patch of sky. It was evidently the edge of the forest. The car went steadily on, and out into the open, clear of the forest; then the chauffeur slowed down.

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"There isn't any road here," he said.

"Go on!" directed The Thinking Machine. "Road or no road — straight ahead!"

The chauffeur took a new grip on his wheel and went straight ahead, over plowed ground, apparently, for the bumping and jolting were terrific, and the steering gear tore at the sockets of his arms. For two or three minutes they proceeded this way, while the scientist's light still played on Fairbank's face and the squint eyes unwaveringly watched every tiny change in it.

"There!" shrieked Fairbanks suddenly, and he struggled to rise.

"There!"

Hatch and Dr. Pollock saw it at the same instant — a faint, rosy point in the distance; The Thinking Machine didn't alter the direction of his gaze.

"Straight for the light!" he commanded.

. . . the room showed every evidence of occupancy . . . log fire was burning, and its flickering light showed books here and there . . . directly in front stood a man, tall, angular, aged, and a little bent . . . hands were knotted, toil-worn; and the left forefinger was missing . . . eyes white and glassy . . .

With a choking, guttural exclamation, Fairbanks darted forward and placed the grinning god on the mantel beside the piece of crystal, then turned back to The Thinking Machine and seized him by the arm, as a child might have sought protection. Meanwhile, the strange old man, who seemed oblivious of their presence, stood beside the fire. The scientist moved toward the old man slowly, Fairbanks staring after him as if fascinated. Finally the scientist extended his hand and touched the old man on the shoulder. He started violently and stretched out both hands instinctively.

Then, while Hatch and Dr. Pollock looked on silently, The Thinking Machine stood motionless, while the strange old man's hands ran up his arm, and the fingers touched The Thinking Machine's face. The right forefinger paused for an instant at the scientist's eyes, then was placed lightly across Professor Van Dusen's thin lips. It remained there.

"You are blind?" asked the scientist.

The strange old man nodded.

"You are deaf?"

Again the old man nodded. His forefinger still rested lightly on The Thinking Machine's lips.

"You are dumb?" the scientist went on.

Again the nod.

"Deafness, dumbness, blindness, result of disease?"

The nod again.

The Thinking Machine turned, grasped Fairbanks's hand, and lifted it to the old man's shoulder.

"Real, real!" said The Thinking Machine slowly to Fairbanks. "A man — you understand?"

Fairbanks merely started back; but it was evident that some great

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struggle was going on in his mind. There was a growing interest in his face, his mouth was no longer flabby, and his eyes were fixed.

. . . then came another sound . . . a curdling, nerve-racking scream . . . a scream of agony, of pain . . .

At the first sound Fairbanks had straightened up, then slowly he started forward. Three steps, and he fell. Hatch and Dr. Pollock turned him over and found an expression of utter, cringing fear on his face. The eyes were glittering, and he was babbling again. Only his weakness had prevented flight.

"Stay there!" said The Thinking Machine, and ran out of the room.

Hatch heard him as he went up the steps; then after a moment there came more screams — rather, a sharp, intermittent wailing. Fairbanks struggled feebly, then lay still, flat on his back. A minute more, and The Thinking Machine returned, leading a woman by the hand — a woman in a gingham apron and with her hair flying loose about her face. He went straight to the old man, who had stood motionless through it all, and raised the toil-worn finger to his lips.

"This woman — your wife?" he asked.

The old man shook his head.

"Your sister?"

The old man nodded.

"She is insane?"

Again a nod.

The woman stood for an instant with roving eyes, then rushed toward the mantel with a peculiar sobbing cry. In another instant she had clasped the ugly ivory image to her withered breast, and was crooning to it softly, as a mother to her babe. Fairbanks raised himself from the floor, stared at her dully for a moment, then fell back into the arms of Dr. Pollock and Hatch. He had fainted.

"I think, gentlemen, that is all," remarked The Thinking Machine.

It was more than a month later that The Thinking Machine called on William Fairbanks at his home. The young man was sitting up in bed, weak but intelligently aware of everything about him. There was still an occasional restlessness in his eyes; but that was all.

"You remember me, Mr. Fairbanks?" began the scientist.

"Yes," was the reply.

"You remember the events of the night we spent together?"

"Everything, from the time the automobile left the road and the light appeared in the distance," said Fairbanks. "I remember seeing the old man again, and the woman. I know now that he was deaf and dumb and blind, and that she was insane. That seems to clear the situation a great deal." He passed a wasted hand across his brow. "But where is the place? I couldn't find it."

"Listen to me carefully, please," said The thinking Machine. When you were placed in a santorium, the ivory image was taken away from you. I went into the room where you were confined and gave it back to you. It

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acted as I thought it would — it quieted you. To make certain that it was this and nothing else that had that effect, I took it away from you again, and you grew violent — as a matter of fact, you became so violent that you overturned a heavy table that was bolted to the floor.

"I left the image with you. That really was the tangible cause of your condition. If it hadn't been for that, and your constant brooding over the mystery, the events of that first night would in time have passed out of your mind. But what happened was that you superinduced self-hypnotism with that little image. You understand, of course, that self-hypnotism is possible only to persons of a certain temperament — and only when the object employed to induce self-hypnotism is polished and shiny.

"Although that image brought you to the condition you were in, I restored the little idol to you to quiet you physically. That was necessary before I could reproduce for you the events of the first night. You went with us in an automobile, from Pelham to the little store where you had stopped that first night for gasoline. We too stopped for gasoline, and saw the man you saw that first night. As a matter of fact, he had gone away only for a short time, and is now installed in the little store again.

"Well, from the little store we went as you went the night of your first trouble, until we came to the two roads, one leading by sharp turns to the left. Then we went straight to the farmhouse where the old man and the woman lived. There I wanted to convince you that they were real people — that there was nothing of the ghostly about them. As a matter of fact, the old man and the woman never even realized that you were in the house that night. The man had no means of knowing it, so long as you never touched him, nor he you. You say he brought in something to eat. In all probability that was intended for the woman. You assumed it was for yourself. The fire which compelled you to jump, and which resulted in your sprained ankle, did not destroy the house. There were still marks of the fire there; but the heavy rain extinguished it, and carpenters made the necessary repairs. Now all that is clear, isn't it?"

"Perfectly; but the white thing in the road — the screaming?"

"There is no mystery whatever about that," continued the scientist calmly. "The road that turns to the left turns more sharply than you imagine. After a little distance it goes almost parallel with the main road, so that following it at night you would, without any knowledge of it, pass within a few hundred feet of a point on the main road. Now the house where these people live is, say, five hundred feet from the road that turns to the left — therefore, not more than seven or eight hundred feet, we'll say, from the main road. Thus the screaming you heard on the main road was from the woman who lived in that house; the figure you

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saw was that woman. Just why she had left the house and was wandering through the wood, we do not know; it is certain that she was there, and was frightened by the storm. Also, she was probably aware that you were pursuing her, and took refuge on an overhanging limb, thus giving you the impression of her figure rising.

"It followed naturally that by the time you had taken the roundabout way with your automobile and reached the house, she had already reached it by going straight ahead through the wood — and again you heard her screams there. Many things happened in the house that night of no consequence in themselves, but which to your excited imagination were mysterious. One of these was the incident of the candle going out. It is obvious that a gust of wind did that, or else a leak in the roof."

Fairbanks was silent for several minutes as he lay back with his eyes closed. "But the vital thing, the thing that bewildered me most of all," he said slowly, "you haven't touched. Why was it that after all my searching I could never again find either the road to the left or the farmhouse?"

"Of course you don't remember," explained The Thinking Machine, "but the night we all went over the route I asked Dr. Pollock and Mr. Hatch just after we left the little store whether they had noticed anything peculiar. They replied in the negative. As a matter of fact," and the scientist was speaking very quietly, "our automobile went the same way yours had gone — not toward Millen, as you supposed and as they supposed, *but back toward Pelham!* You never again found the road to the left or the farmhouse for the simple reason that they were on the other side of the little store — toward Pelham, eight or ten miles away."

A great wave of relief swept over the young man, and he leaned forward eagerly. "But wouldn't I have known when I turned the wrong way?"

The Thinking Machine shrugged his shoulders. "You would have known in daylight, yes," was the reply, "but at night, in a hurry and confused by the flying dust, you simply turned the wrong way. You see how possible it is when I tell you that neither Dr. Pollock nor Mr. Hatch noticed that we had turned the wrong way, even when there was no storm and when I virtually called it to their attention."

There was a long silence. Fairbanks dropped back in the bed, silent.

"In your manuscript," resumed The Thinking Machine at last, "you mentioned that you seemed to hear someone calling you as you started away from the little store. This you attributed vaguely to imagination. As a matter of fact, you did hear someone call — it was the man who had sold you the gasoline. He knew you intended going to Millen, saw that you had turned the wrong way, and called to tell you so. You didn't wait to hear."

And that was all there was to the Mystery of the House That Was . . .

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THE BISHOP OF HELL

by JOSEPH SHEARING

England, 1790.

This is the most awful story that I know; I feel constrained to write down the facts as they ever abide with me, praying, as I do so, a merciful God to pardon my small share therein.

God have mercy on us all!

In the hope, vain though I feel it to be, that when I have written down this tale it may cease to haunt me, I begin.

It was twenty years ago, and never since, day nor night, have I had any respite from the thought of this story, through which you can hear the drums of Hell beat loudly and yet which has an awful beauty.

God have mercy on us all!

Hector Greatrix was my friend, yet to say friend is to profane a noble word; rather was he my counsellor, companion, and prop in all things evil.

His reputation was hideous even among the rake-helly crowd who flattered and followed him; he went lengths from which others shrank, and his excesses, his impiety, his boldness terrified even those hardened in wicked ways.

And what added a deeper edge of horror to his conduct was that he had been an ordained clergyman.

Younger son of a younger son, his father had placed him in the Church in the hope of rapid preferment, for the Greatrix were a highly placed family and the great Earl of Culvers was the head of it; but the scandal of young Hector's life was such that even in those days he was unfrocked. His intimates, in the clubs and gambling dens, called him, in bitter derision, *Bishop of Hell.*

I write of the year 1770, when this tale begins.

Hector Greatrix was then in the height of his fame and fashion. No one could deny him certain splendour; he was literally in physical height head and shoulders above his companions, and mentally also; his wit, his invention, his daring knew no bounds, but all these qualities were turned to evil. He was at this time about thirty years of age, of a magnificent figure, so graceful that his strength was hardly noticeable, tawny haired and tawny eyed, with features as yet unblemished from his debaucheries, the most elegant of hands and feet, the most exquisite taste in dress, and the most engaging of manners. There was not one honourable man nor respected woman among his acquaintances and all his intimates were villains; I do not except myself.

There was, however, one exception. Colonel Bulkeley, his cousin on the female side, had helped him by his countenance and by money. Why, I

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never understood, because William Bulkeley was the most austere, upright, and punctilious of men, of great wealth, of exceptional position, and of the most distinguished career.

I think now, as I thought then, that it was quite impossible for Colonel Bulkeley to realise what Hector Greatrix really was, or the set to which he belonged. The villain could be most plausible, and his cousin must have believed him to be wild, unfortunate, and blamable, but in no way vile or dishonoured.

In sum, Colonel Bulkeley effectually played the mediator between Greatrix and the chief of the family, Lord Culvers, who, no anchorite himself, was not ill-disposed towards his handsome and seductive nephew; but then his lordship, who was much disabled by gout, seldom left Greatrix Park and knew little of London society, so that he was by no means aware of his nephew's reputation.

I, as one of the most reputable of his disreputable friends, being, as I can truly say, more wild and young than vicious, was chosen to go with Hector to Greatrix Park when the old earl asked his company, and so I was able to see at close quarters how this charming knave pulled the wool over the eyes of his two kinsmen.

The end of the comedy was an allowance for Greatrix, a handsome subsidy from the earl most generously supplemented by a few hundreds more from the wealth of Colonel Bulkeley.

Greatrix was to study the law and live in chambers — suitable to his rank; he had no chance of accession to the family honours of the earl, whose heir, a dull, sickly youth enough, had lately married a blooming young woman of robust constitution, who had provided him with a couple of boys. So, Greatrix, thanks to Colonel Bulkeley, had done better than the most sanguine might have hoped. And he seemed more moved thereby than I had thought possible.

"Bulkeley has done me a good turn," he swore, "and damme if I'll ever do him a bad one."

As for his allowance and the study of the law, he laughed at these things; what he really valued was the countenance of these two great, wealthy gentlemen.

"This visit will help my credit in London," he declared. "It is good for a couple of years' debt."

"And what when two years are up and your credit and the patience of your relatives are alike exhausted?"

"Who am I," smiled Greatrix, "to think two years ahead?"

I think it was impossible for him to conceive of disaster or even common misfortune. His object gained, he was impatient to return to town; a woman with red hair was waiting for him. He had a curious and persistent passion for women with that bright shade.

Colonel Bulkeley pressed us to stay a night with him on our way to town, and Greatrix, with an inner curse, for he wanted to be free of this formal, austere man, consented with a winning courtesy.

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Moil Place was in Kent, quite near London, a commodious and elegant residence presided over by Mrs. Bulkeley, who was some several years younger than her husband.

This type of woman was unknown to either Greatrix or myself. I have had no sisters and could not recall the character or the lineaments of my mother; Greatrix had two sisters, but they were town ladies of smirched reputation, and his mother had been a passionate, reckless, uncommon woman.

To both of us Mrs. Bulkeley appeared flat, childish, almost imbecile, almost incredible. She had been married direct from a Clapham boarding-school and had there received several tokens (as the doting husband let slip) for deportment and good conduct.

It was June, and she wore a muslin gown with a wide blue silk sash and a wide straw hat tied under the chin with another ribbon of the same hue. She lisped a little and her small face was clearly and definitely coloured like a china ornament; she was, in fact, like the puppets children dress up and play with; then, when she had gone into the house and was pouring tea behind the Bulkeley silver — pieces that looked larger than herself — she suddenly took off her hat and showed a head overflowing with auburn curls, long, glossy, almost vermilion, yet soft and like burnt gold, all knotted up on the crown of her head.

With this revelation of her hair you saw her beauty — the golden eyes with blonde lashes, the features of such an exquisite delicacy, the pearly shades on throat and neck, the delicious carmine of faint carnation.

I did not care to look at Greatrix, and yet I felt that I need not have suffered this embarrassment.

Colonel Bulkeley was the one man in the world for whom Greatrix had expressed any respect or consideration and the lady obviously adored her husband. I was both amused and surprised to observe the manifestations of sentimental affection between them. There was one child too, a little doll in white lace just out of the cradle; what fondness Colonel Bulkeley could spare from his wife was devoted to the infant.

I was cloyed and thankful when we had taken our seats for town.

Greatrix, after the effort of the last few days, was in a surly mood.

"I have never passed a couple of days so tiresome," he said.

And I, always minded to jeer at him when I could, replied: "You have never seen a woman so beyond your reach, Hector. She never looked at you, I do believe."

He laughed indifferently. "Alicia Bulkeley is ready to the hand of any man who likes to reach out for her."

What was yet good in me was shocked by this insult to our hostess, a woman who, commonplace and childish perhaps, had yet seemed to me to convey a sweet purity, a gentle fidelity, and an adoring affection beyond all reproach.

"She is in love with her husband."

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"The more reason she can be in love with another — 'tis your passionately attached wives who fall the easiest victims; that little creature is amorous as a love-bird. Take Bulkeley away for a month or so and she'd flutter into any arms held out ——"

"By God, Hector," I swore, "if you can't believe in any nobility or decency, don't defame those qualities. Your words stick in my throat. These people have exerted themselves in kindness towards you. Mrs. Bulkeley is silly, maybe, but a gentlewoman deserving of respect."

"Since when have you turned Puritan?" he asked coldly.

I was not affected by his sneers; I felt a certain definite repulsion against him, and from that day I saw less of him and applied myself with some diligence to my studies.

We each of us had rooms in Paper Buildings, and the more I heard of Hector Greatrix the more I withdrew myself from his companionship. Two of his boon fellows shot themselves; the daughter of his laundress was found hanged; a married woman of his acquaintance was taken out of a Hampstead pond one winter morning. His name was associated, secretly and sombrely, with all these tragedies.

Some rumours of these matters must have reached the earl in his lofty retirement, for I heard from the associates of Greatrix who still continued to be mine that there had been a summons to Greatrix Park, quarrels, and the employment once more of Colonel Bulkeley as mediator.

I had seen little of the Bulkeleys; their severe and yet sentimental life, the chaste simplicity of their connubial bliss did not greatly attract me. I had been asked again to Moil Place and had needed all my fortitude to control my yawns. Mrs. Bulkeley had now another infant at her breast and was more than ever infatuated with her husband.

Another six months and this idyllic family was rudely disturbed: Colonel Bulkeley's regiment was ordered to India for three years and he was forced to leave abruptly his wife and children he so tenderly loved.

That winter, to my surprise, I met Mrs. Bulkeley in a London ballroom; it was only a few months since her husband had sailed and I imagined her consoling herself with her babies at Moil Place. When I spoke to her she seemed shy and confused; I learned that she had 'moped' in the country, that the doctor had ordered a change, and that these insufferable years of waiting would seem shorter amid the distractions of society. She was staying with a married brother at St. James's, and I could not doubt that she was well protected both by her own heart, her position, her relatives, her children; yet when I saw her dancing with Hector Greatrix I did not care to watch.

Needless to follow the course of an experienced and heartless seducer; suffice it to say that Greatrix was soon talked of in connection with Mrs. Bulkeley, and, unattainable as I believed her to be, I could not forbear

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an honest appeal to her pursuer.

I found him in his chambers.

"For God's sake, Hector," I conjured him, "stop your attentions to Mrs. Bulkeley; even though it is impossible for you to destroy her peace of mind, you may blight her reputation."

"What is this to me?" he asked coldly. "Did I not tell you she would come at my whistle?"

I urged him to forbear. "Never before have you compromised a woman of her position. Consider what it will mean to you — the fury of your uncle and of her husband, the scandal that will put you out of society — out of England."

"And there," he interrupted, "I am likely to go in any case. I can keep the duns quiet no longer and my lord will be bled no more."

I told him I hoped he would go before Mrs. Bulkeley's good name was smirched by his detestable attentions and I reminded him solemnly of his obligations towards Colonel Bulkeley. He had no answer for me, and soon after I observed with relief that Mr. Lambert, Alicia Bulkeley's brother, had taken alarm and that she was being kept from any opportunity of meeting Greatrix.

Yet what availed this?

Hector Greatrix, having spun his credit to the utmost and within a few hours of the Fleet Prison for debt, fled to the Continent and Alicia Bulkeley went with him.

Though I was never squeamish in these affairs, I will confess that this completely sickened me — the man was so vile, the woman so infantile, so pure, so attached to her husband.

The scandal was hideous. The earl cut Hector off with a curse; the Lamberts adopted the abandoned children; and as soon as they had news of Alicia, sent her a small allowance that was probably the main support of the wretched couple. This money was sent care of a bank in Genoa, but no one knew where Mrs. Bulkeley and her lover really were living.

Through the compassion of His Royal Highness, who had the chief command in India, Colonel Bulkeley was allowed to return to England on the receipt of the awful news and arrived in London something less than two years since he had sailed.

He immediately resigned his commission and returned with his children to Moil Place.

Declaring that he had no intention of following the fugitives, he said simply that if Greatrix ever returned to England one of the two would, in a few days, be dead; and Mr. Lambert, with his next remittance, reported this message, advising his unfortunate sister and her paramour to keep clear of their native country for fear of further scandal and horror.

I avoided the possible chance of meeting Colonel Bulkeley. I had no desire to see this broken and outraged man, whose career, that had promised so splendidly, was broken in the middle and for whom life seemed to hold nothing but bitterness and humiliation.

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This, it might seem, should be the end of the story; it indeed appeared that nothing further could happen, either to the outcasts in their exile or to the betrayed husband, to alter the position of either or in any way bring them together again.

But who would have guessed at the turn Fate had in store.

Colonel Bulkeley had not been home much more than another two years when a severe epidemic of small-pox broke out in England; among the first victims were the wife and children of Lord Culvers; the son by his first marriage, always delicate, had lately died of a decline; and the old earl, then over seventy years of age, did not long endure the shock, but sank under the weight of his bereavement a few days after the funeral of his youngest child.

The estates and the money were both entailed, every portion of property having been strictly tied up by a preceding earl, and Hector Greatrix was now Earl of Culvers and one of the wealthiest noblemen in England.

Lord Culvers was summoned to London by his lawyers, and on the same day Colonel Bulkeley came up from Moil Place and took a house in Dover Street, Mayfair, not far from his lordship's town mansion, Culver House.

Hector came as far as Paris and there stopped. He still had Mrs. Bulkeley with him; not, as I supposed, from any remnants of affection, but because of her allowance, which was till now his sole means of support. I winced to think what Alicia Bulkeley must be like now.

There had never been any talk of a divorce, but now people began to ask why Colonel Bulkeley did not permit his wife to marry her lover; they were people who did not know Hector.

I received, unexpectedly, a summons from my lord to attend him in Paris; he had not too many reputable acquaintances then, and I had become a respectable enough citizen while he was sliding down to pandemonium. Therefore, I supposed, this dubious honour.

I went, as one will, partly out of curiosity, partly out of complacence, and partly out of a faint pity for Alicia Bulkeley.

He had, of course, handled plenty of money already, and upset as the city still was, I found them elegantly installed in a *hôtel méuble* that had only lately become national property.

Hector was sumptuous to behold and cordial enough in his wild way; he had changed for the worse — the first bloom of his beauty had gone, the first fineness of his manners; but he was handsome enough, God help him.

She was with him.

I learnt afterwards that she had had and lost in the feverish heat of Italy three children, and never had she been without another woman sharing her lover's favours; often these lived under the same roof with her. She had known, I think, most of the humiliations possible to a refined woman who lives with a vile, brutal

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man; there could have been little of horror and squalor that she had not seen, nay, been in the midst of. . . .

I could hardly keep curiosity from my eyes — this was the doll of Moil Place, with her lisp, her muslin, her babies.

She was, and this is perhaps the most horrible thing, much more beautiful, rich, opulent in line now, with a full bosom and flowing curves of thighs and shoulders, taller (she had been but eighteen), clever at dressing, clever of speech; gay, abandoned, and intolerably wretched. Her tone was one of bravado, but the look in her eyes was that of a whipped dog who creeps away from the lash.

As soon as we were alone she was down on her knees to me with a movement so passionately sudden that I could in no way prevent it — on her knees, Mrs. Bulkeley of Moil Place!

"Tell me," she implored, "will not William divorce me? Surely you have some message from him?"

I told her, none.

She began to weep. "If I were free Hector might marry me before he returned to England — that is my only hope."

"Surely, madam," said I in pity, "a vain one?"

But she was not yet free of the illusion women are so slow to lose — that they have always some power over a man who has once loved them or been their lover, and she cherished the desperate hope that her husband might set her free and she regain something of all she had lost under the name of Lady Culvers.

Never was there a more futile and piteous hope even in the brain of a foolish woman. I could not forbear saying to her, when I had induced her to rise from her knees: "Madam, has not your association with my lord shown you the manner of man he is?"

"Indeed it has," she answered bitterly, "yet surely he could not, in these changed circumstances, abandon me ——"

So she clung to the protection of that honour she had herself discarded, and a panic terror showed in her eyes as she added that she had now nothing with which to keep him — it had always been the money that had held him; the money the Lamberts sent, and, Heaven avert its face, other money, presents from Italian lovers of hers whom he had forced on her; she told me, with a wildness that made me fear for her reason, that she had paid for her last child's funeral by such means.

"And yet, madam," I shuddered, "you wish to continue your association with such a monster? Indeed, I wonder that you have not already left him, if only for the protection of another man."

As she was silent, I added: "Is it possible that you love him?"

She replied: "No, I have never loved any but William and my dear, dear children."

But I doubt if she knew what love was, and I think that for months she had known no emotion save fear.

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Seeking to abate her misery I asked her what she could dread worse than had yet befallen her.

"There's Hell," she said.

"I should think," I replied, "that Hell is where my lord is."

But no; to her, still at heart a religious, respectable English gentlewoman, anything was preferable to the life of open shame before her if my lord forsook her; she thought, in her narrow, ignorant mind, that if she could marry her lover her fault would be condoned; and I knew that in the eyes of many it would be.

I advised her that she could go into retreat somewhere with the money that the Lamberts allowed her, but she shook her head with a feeble laugh; she knew, she said with a dreadful accent, her own weakness, and she saw herself, once cast off by my lord, sinking to the lowest depths of degradation, till she reached Bridewell or a foreign lazar house.

And I could see this too. I promised to speak to my lord, but naturally with little hope; but the next day when I saw him, sitting over his breakfast playing with his dogs, he gave me no opening, for he plunged into his own affairs.

"Look 'ee here, Jack," he said, "I was too drunk yesterday to talk business and when I came back from the opera you'd gone. But this is the matter I've sent for you for — has Bulkeley seen reason? As I've no news, I take it he has gone to his prayers and his pumpkins at Moil Place and will give no trouble."

"No," I said, "Colonel Bulkeley came up to London as soon as he heard of your fortune, and has taken lodgings in Dover Street — 'tis said that he keeps a watch posted by Culver House for your return."

My lord's face turned ashy.

"What for?" he cried.

"That he may challenge you the moment that you set foot in England."

My lord sprang up then; his rage was diabolic, there is no other word for this fury of a fiend outwitted at last; his oaths and blasphemies were detestable, atrocious, as he strode up and down with his dressing-gown flowing open and his locks, damp from last night's debauch, seeming to rise on his head.

"I never heard," I said, wincing, "that you were a coward, Hector, but it seems you are."

"Coward!" he yelled. "When I eloped with Bulkeley's wife I was a ruined man without a prospect in the world — did I think I'd ever want to return to England with the title and the money?"

He had been, in fact, exquisitely caught, but I could feel no spark of compassion for him.

"You'll have to meet the man," I told him, not looking at his distorted face.

"I'll not. Bulkeley is a damned good shot. Do you think I want to go out when I've suddenly got everything to my hand?"

I could guess that he did not; to him the position, the money, meant

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the opening of Paradise. He would, no doubt, have a good life — fine flatterers, fine women, all that wealth could buy in London would be his; nay, there would be plenty who would receive him in the finest society of the town and not scruple to offer him their daughters in honourable matrimony; the hounded exile would be the great lord and at last able to get full value for his rank, his beauty, his audacity, his fascination.

"I stay in Paris," he cried. "People will come over to me here. I'll cheat the man that way. Paris is as well as London if you have money."

"It were wiser, perhaps," I said with disgust. "But no one will endure a man who is an avowed coward, my lord; you'll have to keep the company you've been used to lately if you stay out of England. People will know why — they're beginning to say already that you linger. I for one," and I rose, "would turn my back on you."

"Blast your impudence, Jack," he whispered. "What is this tone to me?"

"You're a peer of England. Culvers is a great name; it'll cover much, but not cowardice."

"Damn that word. I don't want to die — that's reasonable."

"Yes; if I were you, my lord, I should not want to die."

"Bah, you're thinking of my bishopric. Hell! As if I believed in Hell. There's nothing, not even Hell, Jack — one goes out like a snuffed candle — just blackness, nothingness."

The look on his face as he said this was one of such awful despair that I thought this was a moment when he might be softened by his own terrors.

"I can see one possible way out. Hector, if you were to let Colonel Bulkeley know that if he divorced his wife you would marry her — perhaps for her sake, he would forgo his revenge."

He laughed in my face.

"The woman's been the harlot of half the rogues in Italy."

I stopped him. "Don't talk of that — even your corroded heart might blench there. Marry her, if you can, for your soul's sake and hers."

His hideous pride was greater than his fear.

"A kept woman," he mocked. "My God, I'm Culvers now."

"Remember it," I recommended him. "What do you mean to do with this poor creature?"

Then, as if he remembered that she was the original cause of his present predicament, he began to curse her, using those abominable names he so freely applied to women, and as for what he meant to do with her, his project was what the miserable wretch had herself guessed — complete abandonment; and his view of her future was her view — the streets and the *maison de Dieu.*

I reminded him of her birth and upbringing, of her relatives, but he only redoubled his blasphemies.

"Am I answerable if these Puritans breed women who run into the gutter?"

I left him; useless to contemplate a spectacle so frightful.

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And I avoided any further interview with Alicia Bulkeley.

When I returned to London I observed the watcher set by Colonel Bulkeley near the shuttered gloom of Culver House.

In three months' time my lord returned to London; whether urged thereto by the jeers of his enemies, the flatteries of his friends, or his own pride, or whether unable to endure his tantalus position, or whether his nerve broke at the suspense and the waiting, I know not, but he came to London. I had heard that he had hopes of approaching Bulkeley with offers of apology or even money; of seeking in some way an accommodation. This sounded ridiculous, but from his nature it was possible to conclude that he cherished some such plan. He arrived in London secretly, with a horrid stealth, and slipped into Culver House under cover of a November evening.

Yet the next morning Lord Mildmay called on him with a challenge from Colonel Bulkeley.

That same evening I was summoned to Culver House.

My lord sat with some of his old boon companions in one of the dismantled rooms (for his coming had been sudden and unexpected); the holland covers were yet over the great velvet and gilt chairs, muslin bags enveloped the candelabra, and where the bottles and glasses stood on the ornate table were rings in the dust; candles had been hastily stuck into tarnished sticks, and the only servants were the French rascals my lord had brought with him.

Rosy *amorini* and florid wreaths peeped from the shadows of the imposing walls, and the lordly pomp of this chill magnificence was a strange background for the men drinking by the huge fire on the marble hearth. Everyone was drunk but my lord, but he, this night, could find no oblivion in the wine cup; panic kept his head clear, and I could see by the ferocious anguish of his face that his thoughts were by no means dimmed.

He met me with bravado.

"If I go to Hell to-morrow, I'll pay you a visit to let you know what 'tis like."

"Is Bulkeley so infallible?" asked one of his followers, and another, with tipsy malice: "He's a damn good shot."

"He has on his side justice at least," I said coldly, for I had now come to detest my lord.

He looked at me in agony.

"Say I've a chance," he muttered, and I smiled, always having believed him to be of an invincible courage.

For all that I thought his chance good enough; if Bulkeley was a fine marksman, so was my lord.

"Why don't you get to bed? What time is the meeting?" I looked with contempt at his hideous company; not one of them had set foot in Culver House, or any mansion like it, before.

"Seven o'clock to-morrow morning," said one Hilton, the soberest of the wretched band and my lord's second.

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It was now past midnight.

"Why have you sent for me?" I asked again.

He was pacing up and down the room in a very climax of terror and rage, while the drunken crew round the table condoled with and mocked him in a breath. He wore an almond-green velvet coat, overlaced, I recall, with silver — for that year the men's clothes began to be very plain — and his hair was long and powdered in the old-fashioned style still favoured in Italy. I think that the beauty of his lineaments rendered his expression the more awful — the despair, the dread, the fury expressed in that pale visage were awful indeed to contemplate.

"I will not go!" he cried. "I'll not stand up to be killed!"

He then asked me to make his will (I was by then a lawyer of some modest standing), for the Culver property was his to dispose of since he was the last male of his family. Yet when it came to asking his wishes he would not reply, and finally refused to consider the matter; and so I left him staring into the huge mirror with a glass of brandy in his hand and cursing the clock for marking the passing of the time.

I had not dared to ask him anything of Alicia Bulkeley, but as I was leaving I did demand particulars of the lady from one of the servants, a man I had seen in Paris.

She had been left in Paris, quieted, I gathered, by some lie as to my lord's return. This affair and mainly the memory of my lord's face so wrought on my mind that I could not sleep that night and went out early for news of the duel.

I got this from the creature Hilton, the second.

The meeting had taken place in Hyde Park; at the first shot my lord had fallen.

"Killed?" asked Colonel Bulkeley.

"Sir," said the surgeon, bending over the writhing man, "death would have been more merciful — he is shot through the jaw."

"He is marked where I aimed to mark him," replied the implacable soldier coldly. "He will never kiss another man's wife again; nor his own; nor even any drab from Whitefriars."

With that remark he left the Park; his austere figure and his sombre countenance had never changed during the course of the encounter.

My lord was carried home in his carriage; he soon became unconscious, for the lower part of his face was shattered, half blown away, and, though he might well live, he would never be anything but a mask of terror.

Alicia Bulkeley, quieted for the moment by my lord's lies, no sooner lost sight of him than she fell into a fierce panic and resolved to follow him by the next packet. With little more than the price of her journey in her pocket and accompanied by a huge Negress, who was her last attendant, she landed at Dover twenty-four hours after my lord, and took the night coach to London.

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Arriving there, the demented creature could think of no asylum but Culver House; and, as she could hardly believe that the man for whom she had sacrificed everything and with whom she had lived for years would refuse her shelter, she directed her steps to the mansion of my lord.

The valet who opened to her knew her and was for refusing admission, but the Negress said cunningly (Mrs. Bulkeley being past coherent speech) that my lord had sent for them; and the servant, not knowing if this might be so, reluctantly admitted them. The two shuddering and draggled women had just reached the great doors on the first landing when my lord came home.

He had regained consciousness, and though his pain was fearful he had no tongue to make lament with; he walked between Hilton and the surgeon, who were indeed not well able to carry so large a man, and so slowly came up the wide treads of the stairs to where Mrs. Bulkeley, who had heard the steps, cowered against the door, her silk shawl, her fallen hair, her bonnet disarranged, her face like milk, her lips ashy.

As my lord came into view, with his jaw swathed in bloody bandages and his terrible eyes above them, she broke into shriek after shriek; my lord sprang forward with a strength that made nothing of those who held him, took the frail wretch in his quivering hands and hurled her down the stairs. The surgeon tried to catch her, but she was weak and her high heel caught in her dress; she fell to the bottom of the flight and lay in the hall.

Whimpering, the Negress scuttled after her; Hilton, to please his patron, from whom he still hoped favours, said: "It's Alicia Bulkeley, the cause of the whole damn business — turn her out," he added to the valet.

The surgeon, who was a fashionable man and fee'd by my lord, made no protest, and as the earl was led to his chamber, the servant and the Negress picked up Mrs. Bulkeley and carried her into the street. She stirred as they touched her and the black woman clamoured for pity, so that the valet consented to carry her to a pot-house nearby, where the landlady, after marking her rings and watch, took her in and let her lie in a back room, where the customers came and stared at her and the air was thick with the smell of smoke and beer.

She asked for her husband and a clergyman, but the Negress was too ignorant to know what she meant; and so, about noon, she died, aged not quite twenty-three years.

It was a clear case of murder, but the landlady and her gossip, the slippered doctor, hushed the thing up, robbed her of her rings, watch, silk, and linen garments — and even the burnt gold hair that had first attracted my lord — and buried her in a pauper's grave. The Negress they turned into the street; and she, distracted with terror, crept back to Culver House and begged for scraps at the kitchen door. There, out of compassion, they gave her my name

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and where I was to be found, and I discovered her on my stairs when I came home that night and so learnt from her the manner of Alicia Bulkeley's death. I sent the poor wretch to a friend who had a house of servants, and debated whether or not I should write to Colonel Bulkeley.

I was not encouraged to do so by the remembrance of his face on the morning of the duel, and while I hesitated I had news of the death of my lord. This was practically suicide, because his life had never been in danger, but he tore off the bandages with a ruthless hand, turned his mutilated face to the wall and furiously died — the day of the burial of Alicia Bulkeley.

Would that this were the end and that I, who believed in neither Heaven nor Hell, could have here finished with Hector Greatrix.

I went out that-day to a gathering of people who knew nothing of my lord, and stayed late, endeavouring to forget. I drank and danced and gambled, and fled the gossips who must mouth over the Culvers' scandal.

When I returned I found that the light on the stairs, commonly left there by my laundress, had gone out, so must fumble my way up in the dark and silence of the quiet building. When I reached my room I must fumble again in the dark for flint and tinder, feeling from one piece of furniture to another; it was cold, and through the tall window I could see the moon like an icicle in the dark sky. At last, when I had begun to be considerably oppressed by the dark, I found the tinder-box.

As I set the flaming tinder to the candle I perceived that I was not alone in the room; someone was seated in the hooded chair that had its back towards me; a man. I could see the white hand hanging down, the skirt of a coat on which some bullion trimming gleamed. I concluded that a friend, minded to pay me a visit, had gone to sleep awaiting my return.

I approached, holding my light, and with I know not what feeling of unfathomable dread.

The figure turned as I neared.

It was my lord.

He wore the almond-green suit with the silver braiding in which I had seen him hold his ghastly vigil of terror and fury. God have mercy!

His face was alight; where the visage should have been was a ripple of flames quivering upwards, and through this crimson veil of fire gleamed his infernal eyes with an expression of unutterable woe. The flames rose above his head, shaped into a peak; he wore a shining mitre glittering with lambent fires of green and blue like hellish jewels.

This fiend had been forced to keep his oath — to discover to another scoffer the truth of Hell.

My eyes could not long support this atrocious spectacle; as he raised his ashy hand in mock benediction, I fell senseless, seeing as I dropped the demoniacal mitre flare from his flaming brows to a man's height above his tortured eyes.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Kitty Harwood's "Papa's Going Bye-Bye" is one of the seven "first stories" which won Special Awards in the EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. Despite its brevity, it is in many ways the finest "first story" submitted to last year's contest. It has mood, clear characterizations, a feeling of impending doom, and a remarkable sense of leashed power. . . .

The author tells us that "her hopes and dreams have always been nailed to the fiction mast." She is a transplanted Buckeye from Springfield, Ohio, where in earlier years she was the champion composition writer of her grade school. Later, she wrote home-is-the-end-of-the-rainbow essays for her college magazine at Hollins College, Virginia, and still later she was the author of a trunkful of somewhat sepulchral tales which were never "exposed to the judgment of any callous editor."

Now, she and her husband, also a Springfielder, live in Miami Beach, Florida, where they are "attached like barnacles to Hibiscus Island in Biscayne Bay, and are authorities on hurricanes, large, small, round and oblong." Before World War II, Kitty Harwood joined the staff of a seasonal magazine, "The Gondolier," and when the war put that periodical out of business, she found a full-time publicity job with a local volunteer organization which provided recreation centers for the 4,000,000 servicemen who swarmed over Miami Beach. The job carried no salary, but it repaid Kitty Harwood royally in the deep satisfaction that she was doing her bit, and in furnishing her with what amounted to a free four-year education in newspaper work. It was the newspaper experience which made Kitty Harwood decide to free-lance, which in turn led to her sending a "first story" to EQMM's annual contest, and which ultimately led to acceptance and publication. So, as always, "giving" eventually pays dividends far above rubies . . .

PAPA'S GOING BYE-BYE

by KITTY HARWOOD

OUTSIDE, A CAR HORN BLASTED. Harry was home. . . . The two Boxers, muscles rippling their smooth hides, shoved Cora off-balance in their headlong rush to the front door. The rug sailed out under the thrust of their powerful legs, their nails clawed the bare floor, and Cora held her

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breath for fear they'd smash on through the new heavy screening with which the door had already been repaired.

"Cora. *Cora!* Ya deef? Let 'em out!"

Harry, cap pushed off his sweaty face, arrogantly bloop-blooped the horn again. There was no top to the car — an old custom-built touring car, as ponderous as a truck. Always something wrong with it. But, so what? What other bus driver flashed around town in a job built originally for a millionaire?

In a bullying voice, ill suited to his words, Harry called, "Papa's going bye-bye; papa's going bye-bye."

The Boxers lunged at the screen. "Papa's going bye-bye" was their signal.

Fearful of Harry, fearful of the Boxers overpowering the small house with their brutish clamor, Cora unlatched the door with cold fingers.

The dogs shot off the porch — two tawny streaks flying down the lawn. Cora could see their muscles bunch as they crouched and leaped in unison, cleanly and gracefully, onto the back seat. The cumbrous old car sagged under the sudden weight of the two heavy animals, and Harry roared and slapped his leg. Then he drove off.

As usual, Cora felt a strange sympathy for the old car whose rear axle, she noticed, again complained — a thing that kept annoying Harry. He was always having to fix it.

Slowly Cora went back to the kitchen. Harry had had that black look of his. Wondering if it were on account of her folks again, she felt her stomach twist with a chill apprehension.

It was her father Harry hated — an old, feeble, defenceless, childish man, too far gone in his mind even to know that. But her mother knew. Their slender hold on security was the little cottage — shack! — they lived in that belonged to Harry. But it was bright, with a geranium in the window. Then, suddenly, her father couldn't work any more, and so they couldn't pay Harry anything.

They could grovel, of course.

Her face clouding wistfully, Cora stirred the stew, thinking how wonderful it would be if she could leave Harry, get a job, and support the old people. They'd have little picnics in the park, laugh again, sit companionably around the lamp at nights.

But Harry had other plans. Cora, like the Boxers, was his property. She would stay in his kitchen, clean his house, and keep her whining mouth shut. He'd do as he pleased: it was his money.

"And I want my cottage back," he had said. "I'm sick of them leeches of yours. Let 'em go sponge on the county. Either that," he had threatened her, "or I spill enough about your old man to put him in jail."

In her nervousness Cora dropped the lid of the flour tin. Surely her father had committed no crime. All he ever did was sit in the sun and stroke the cat and talk to himself. Or once in a while he'd sneak off to

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the bus terminal, to wait patiently until Harry brought his bus in, admiring the way Harry spun the big steering wheel with one strong circular motion. Pitifully enough, he worshiped Harry. When Harry got down off the bus he'd pluck him by the sleeve and grin. It made Harry wild.

Hearing the squeal of tires, Cora hurriedly began putting plates on the table. The Boxers galloped into the kitchen, striking the table leg and rattling dishes. Harry stood there, weaving a little.

"I warned you," he said, and Cora's heart lurched sickeningly. "They're gonna investigate, and I ain't taking the rap for no doddering old fool."

Cora, with the coffee pot in her hand, stared at him.

"He come to the terminal again, your old man, and he killed a kid. I parked and got out to get a drink, and next thing I knew the bus was sliding backwards. It went back across the sidewalk and ran over a boy."

"But how . . . ?" began Cora.

"He got in the bus and let off the brake when my back was turned."

"People would have seen him!"

"Yellin' and excited? Nah! I grabbed him and give him a kick toward home."

"Then you didn't tell?"

Harry's eyes were black again. "I was rattled. But now they'll question me. And get this, Cora: it ain't me they're gonna pin it on."

"Wait," Cora said suddenly. "My father can't drive. He wouldn't know what a brake is. And he's afraid of a bus. You couldn't coax him into one."

Harry's face sharpened. "I'm the company's best driver. They'll believe me. They know he keeps coming to the terminal."

Very deliberately Cora set down the coffee pot. Then she met his eyes. "You didn't set that brake; you forgot to. It's your fault and you want to put the blame on someone who's helpless — to save your own skin. He never was in that bus. He never was at the terminal."

A smile of pure malice twisted Harry's lips. "He was at the terminal, all right. Ask your old lady if he was home all day Thursday."

Only the snuffling of the Boxers broke the silence.

So that was it! Luckily for Harry, her father *had* been at the terminal. But if he really had climbed into the bus, Harry would never have waited this long to tell. He'd been hinting about her father and jail just to have an alibi ready in case there was trouble.

Now, with an investigation coming, Harry was in hot water unless he could shift the blame to someone else. And he could shift it to her father. Everyone knew the old man was off his head, that he sometimes hung around the terminal. Harry'd say the reason he hadn't said anything before was because, well, it was his wife's father. And they'd believe him.

"Harry, don't tell them. I'll do anything. I'll get the old folks out tomorrow, tonight. They'll never

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bother you again. I'll do anything you say. Harry . . ."

"I take no rap for no crazy loon!" Turning, Harry walked away, staggering to one side as the dogs milled against his legs. He kicked at them viciously, and in a minute the screen door slammed. Automatically Cora set the stew aside. Her trapped thoughts beat round and round.

"Cora!"

It was Harry's voice calling her name. Blindly, stumbling against the Boxers, she ran to the door. Sometimes Harry's rages didn't last.

"Bring me the monkey-wrench."

In her haste Cora pawed through three drawers, scattering their contents. When she got out to the street, Harry was cursing the axle again. Both rear wheels had been yanked off and the massive rear end of the car was held above the ground by a flimsy-looking jack.

"Gimme that," he gritted, and snatched the monkey-wrench. Lying down on his back he inched himself awkwardly under the axle, feet first.

"Harry," Cora said shakily, "about the little boy. If they put my father in jail it will kill him. My mother, too. You've got a good record. They wouldn't do anything to you."

"Shut up!" He had the monkey-wrench clamped to something and was jerking it furiously.

Slowly, tiredly, her shoulders sagging, Cora went back up the lawn. She reached the porch and turned.

Violent and ugly, Harry worked with reckless force. Through the haze of her misery Cora saw that with each jerk of the monkey-wrench the car so close above him, swayed slightly, swayed insecurely, on its slender pedestal. A sudden push . . .

Cora's expression didn't change; only her eyes darkened and deepened.

The Boxers, impatient behind the screen door, trampled each other.

Cora's hand on the knob was steady. "*Papa's going bye-bye*," she said to them clearly.

And she opened the door.

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